

2/BRIEFING

COLUMN ONE

PEOPLE

Police dog's death leads to RSPCA ban

British police dogs have long been admired for their courage under fire and readiness to take on even the most unsavoury characters, but now questions are being asked about just how they are transformed from man's best friend into criminal's worst enemy.

The image of the trusty bobby with his faithful companion (such as Sabre, pictured) by his side is a familiar one. But the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has decided to stop supplying dogs to police forces in England and Wales following allegations of cruelty during the animals' training.

The decision, by the animal welfare establishment committee, followed claims that a police dog died after being kicked during training by Essex police. Acer, a German Shepherd, collapsed and died on 11 November while on a week-long refresher course. A post-mortem examination showed that he died from a haemorrhage caused by a ruptured liver. It was alleged that Constable Mark Needham, Acer's handler, was ordered to kick the dog while he was tied to a pole, to teach him to control his aggressive tendencies. A close colleague said PC Needham had refused to kick the dog at first and was devastated when the two-year-old black and tan dog collapsed.



Essex police had already begun an internal investigation following complaints from another dog handler about the force's training methods. A statement from the force said: "Following a complaint by a dog handler in October this year about training methods employed by the Essex Police Dog Training Centre, an internal investigation was set up under Deputy Chief Constable Charles Clark." Training methods used by the centre have been stopped pending the results of the investigation, it added.

An RSPCA spokeswoman said: "The suspension on the rehoming of RSPCA dogs to police forces will remain in place until the internal investigation by Essex Police is completed. We have to be particularly watchful, especially if the dogs we supply have already come from a home where they are badly treated. We have to be completely accountable to the people who fund us."

The training methods which were understood to have led to the death of the dog have horrified other police dog trainers and handlers. Corporal punishment of dogs is banned in a Home Office police training manual.

— Kate Watson-Smyth



Judge sets March deadline for all Louise appeals

Lawyers for Louise Woodward (pictured in court) may seek permission for her to be allowed back to England for Christmas after the highest court in Massachusetts declined yesterday to grant a prosecution request that she be returned to prison.

"Obviously we would prefer to see Louise have an opportunity to go home for the holidays," Andrew Good, a member of her defence team, said after the hearing at the Supreme Judicial Court in Boston. "We may appeal to the courts for leave for Louise to use her passport."

In a hearing that lasted barely two minutes, Justice Ruth Abrams pledged that criminal proceedings in the nanny trial would be con-

cluded once and for all in March when the full court of seven justices will rule on all appeals issues pending in the case. Normally, such an appeals process would take at least a year.

Before Justice Abrams yesterday was a prosecution request for a stay of the extraordinary rulings issued by Woodward's trial judge, Hiller Zobel, three weeks ago when he reduced her guilty verdict in the death of Matthew Eappen from second-degree murder to one of manslaughter and set her free.

Had the stay been granted, Woodward would have found herself instantly returned to prison. It was deferred by Justice Abrams for consideration in March alongside the formal appeals expected from

both sides. While the prosecution wants the second-degree murder verdict reinstated, the defence will be seeking a dismissal of the manslaughter conviction and final vindication for Woodward.

Meanwhile, it may be possible for her lawyers to win permission from Judge Zobel for temporary access to her passport at least to leave the state for Christmas. Woodward is currently lodging at the home of Elaine Whitfield Sharp, also on the defence team, in a seaside suburb north of Boston. Both her parents have returned to England. Friends said she was filling her time trying to make friends, reading supporters' letters and going to a local gym.

— David Osborne, Boston

Diana's memorial committee is named

by Chris Priestley

Earl Spencer will attend meetings of the newly formed Diana, Princess of Wales, Memorial Committee when he is in Britain, although he is not a member, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, said yesterday.

The 10-strong committee, headed by Mr Brown, includes film maker Lord Altonborough (who introduced Diana to the anti-landmines campaign which became her highest-profile charity work), Diana's sister Lady Sarah McCorquodale, her butler Paul Burrell, the Princess's friend Rosa Monckton, divorce solicitor Anthony Julius, former overseas development minister Baroness Chalker and Lord Chamberlain, Lord Airie, who represents the Royal Household. Comic Relief co-founder and charity worker Jane Tewson is also a committee member along with Diane Louise Jordan, an ex-Blue Peter television presenter.

The committee will consider possible memorials of the late Princess, who died in a Paris car crash nearly three months ago. Mr Brown said 7,000 proposals for memorials had been received from members of the public.

"Diana, Princess of Wales, was greatly loved, and I consider it an honour to have been asked by the Prime Minister to chair this important committee," he said. "The public have responded magnificently to my request for proposals for commemorating the work of the Princess of Wales. Every one of the 7,000 proposals so far has been carefully read and every one will be taken into account."

The committee will be assisted by an advisory group of representatives from all the main political parties and by a further group drawn from the charities which the Princess supported. Membership of these groups will be announced shortly.

UPDATE

INDUSTRY

Post Office comes under attack

The Post Office has been given a stamp of disapproval from consumer watchdogs as it prepares to handle more than 2.2 billion letters in the run up to Christmas. Postmen have been accused of putting parcels at risk from thieves, giving bad advice and not redirecting letters efficiently enough.

Which? magazine posted 60 parcels in a survey to test the delivery service. Only three people out of 22 who were out when their parcels arrived were left a note saying where it had been left — and eight of those were left in places easily accessible to thieves. In a test of Post Office staff's knowledge, 23 out of 60 offices gave inadequate advice on insuring parcels. More than one-third of the staff also gave incorrect information about how long delivery would take. The £6-a-month service for redirecting mail was tested by nine people: of the letters posted first class 15 never arrived, 10 were sent to the old address, and 11 took four or more days to arrive.

Which? assistant editor, Malcolm Coles, said: "With no close competitors, the Post Office has little incentive to change," he said a regulator was needed to set and enforce standards of advice and delivery. A Post Office spokesman said it was "nonsense" to say it faced no competition: the Royal Mail competed with fax, telephones, electronic mail, and couriers; Parcelforce with 4,000 parcel companies and other mail-shot firms; and the Courier network with banks, building societies and other retailers.

ENVIRONMENT

Junk food scores on energy-efficiency

Meat eaters and junk-food addicts are more politically correct than healthy vegetarians when it comes to helping the environment, it was claimed yesterday. A survey of energy used to produce and distribute food found that meat, sweets, ice cream, potato chips and white bread were among the most efficient and least polluting. Salad vegetables, tomatoes, high-fibre cereals, fruit, white fish, tea and coffee, were more harmful to the environment.

David Coley and colleagues at the Centre for Energy and the Environment at Exeter University analysed how much energy from fuel was used in the production cycle of food in a typical shopping basket. *New Scientist* magazine reported. Taking into account the manufacture and application of fertilisers and other chemicals, harvesting, processing, packaging, transport and waste disposal, the diets of more than 2,000 people used 18,000 megajoules (MJ) of energy each year — almost six times the energy locked in the food itself. The most energy-wasteful item was coffee, which required 177 MJ of energy to produce one MJ of food intake. Typical salad vegetables required 45 MJ and white fish 36, compared with just 8 MJ for beef and burgers, 7 for chicken, and 6 for lamb. While fresh fruit consumed between 10 and 22 MJ, sweets, crisps, white bread and ice cream were right at the bottom of the table using less than one MJ each. "Food is a large part of an individual's impact on the greenhouse effect," Mr Coley said.



TOURISM

Visitors set to break record

The number of overseas tourists visiting Britain reached almost 20 million in the first nine months of this year, it was announced yesterday. The Office for National Statistics said that a surge in numbers in September took the running total to 19.98 million, boosted by a major influx from North America, where visitor numbers are so far up 11 per cent this year.

The near 20 million figure is 2 per cent up on the January-September 1996 total and last year's record annual figure of nearly 26 million is expected to be beaten. The number of visitors from western Europe rose slightly in September, reaching 1.49 million compared with 1.47 million in September, 1996 — but, mainly due to the strong pound, their numbers this year are 1 per cent down. So far this year overseas visitors have spent £9.64bn — 2 per cent more than January-September 1996.

The ONS also said 15.5 million visits were made abroad by UK residents in July-September, 1997 — up from 14.03 million for 1996.

HEALTH

Obesity linked to hormone

A team of Scottish scientists investigating weight control have made a breakthrough in the fight against obesity, it has been revealed. Researchers from Aberdeen University have identified specific brain cells which are receptive to signals from a hormone called leptin which controls food intake and body weight. Their ground-breaking research, published for the first time in the science journal *Nature*, explains that the brain signals which alert us as to when we are satiated with food and can eat no more may be dysfunctional in obese people. The researchers believe that, having shown how leptin works and having identified the endpoint of the brain cell which activates the "full up" signal, they will be able to develop a safe drug to by-pass the defective system within the glucose responsive cells of the brain. They said clinical trials could be under way in five or six years.

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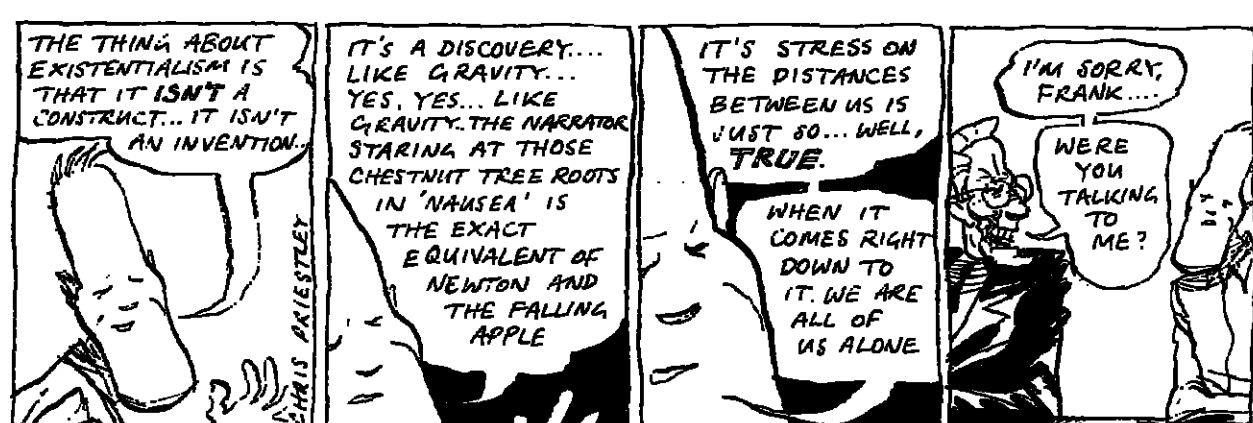
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TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.40	Italy (lira)	2,856
Austria (schillings)	20.39	Japan (yen)	214.18
Belgium (francs)	59.97	Malta (lira)	0.63
Canada (\$)	2.32	Netherlands (guilders)	3.26
Cyprus (pounds)	0.84	Norway (kroner)	11.82
Denmark (kroner)	11.11	Portugal (escudos)	294.51
France (francs)	9.71	Spain (pesetas)	244.96
Germany (marks)	2.91	Sweden (kroner)	12.78
Greece (drachme)	463.61	Switzerland (francs)	2.35
Hong Kong (\$)	12.63	Turkey (lira)	320,866
Ireland (puns)	1.10	USA (\$)	1.64

Source: Thomas Cook
Rates for indication purposes only

7.30 FOR 8



ZITS

by Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



THE GRRRRAND PRIX

GRRRAHAM'S PORT

Just roll it round your tongue.

W. & J. GRAHAM'S
THE PORT OF AUTHORITY

letter a pl
competer



his lawyers try

صحنه من الامتحان

'Better a philistine who can add up than this incompetent lot of buffs and ballet lovers'

The Government last night promised "planned change" to the running of the Royal Opera House following a damning report by a Commons select committee. David Lister, arts news editor, examines MPs' accusations of mismanagement and incompetence.

The chairman, chief executive and board should resign "with immediate effect". A financially acute "philistine" should be appointed to run the show. If the board and chief executive don't resign, the Government should cut off all public money.

That is the staggering conclusion of the Culture, Media and Sport select committee inquiry into the Royal Opera House. The language is colourful, the analysis damning, the recommendations dramatic. And the invective left senior figures at the ROH shaking in disbelief.

The committee meanwhile expressed its own disbelief at the business practices of the ROH which meant that no balance sheets or cash flows could be produced for them. The committee was also highly critical of the previous Covent Garden regime headed by Sir Jeremy Isaacs.

Yesterday Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, broke precedent by reacting immediately to a select committee report.

He said he shared the committee's view "that substantial changes are now required", but added: "I am concerned that overnight and precipitate change, either in the management of the Royal Opera House or by an instant withdrawal by the Arts Council of financial support for the Royal Opera House, would in fact endanger your and my underlying objectives. I am anxious that planned change should now take place."

It seems unlikely that Mr Smith will preempt the inquiry being undertaken by Sir Richard Eyre into the ROH. Sir Richard will not report until next May.

Staff at Covent Garden have written a letter, published in today's *Independent* today, supporting Mary Allen, their chief executive, who is vilified in the report. Neither Ms Allen, nor Lord Chadlington, her chairman, intend to resign over the report.

Ms Allen said: "I entirely reject the criticisms in the committee's report of my conduct at the time of my appointment in May this year." Referring to how she was made chief executive without the post being advertised, when she was at the time chief executive of the ROH's funding body, she said: "If it was a mistake, it was an honest one."

The committee, chaired by Gerald Kaufman, recommends that Mr Smith appoint an administrator to take the place of the board and the chief executive of the Royal Opera House for the two year remainder of the closure period - the recommendation which Mr Smith has so



clearly and quickly rejected. "Should the board and the chief executive decline to accept the committee's recommendation that they resign, we recommend the Secretary of State make clear to the Arts Council that he expects them to cease payments of grant-in-aid to the Royal Opera House forthwith," the report continues - a further recommendation which was effectively dismissed by the Secretary of State.

The report says: "The administrator must be chosen for his or her business skills; we would prefer to see the House run by a philistine with the requisite financial acumen than by the succession of opera and ballet lovers who have brought a great and valuable institution to its knees."

The ROH is accused of "incompetence", "disastrous mismanagement" and "a deplorable lack of financial information".

It says: "In the light of the fact that the ROH has received £98 million of taxpayers' money in the last five years, we are as-

tounded that the Arts Council seems to have expressed no concern at this state of affairs. There is no future for the Royal Opera House unless someone accepts responsibility for the sorry train of events we have described. In addition, we question the vigilance of the Charity Commissioners."

But it is Mary Allen, who this summer took up the post from her previous job as Arts Council general secretary without a formal selection process, or the post being advertised, who is singled out for particular criticism. The report says: "We found Ms Allen's convoluted explanation of her actions entirely unconvincing."

The committee, whose report was unanimous, recommended that the "inappropriate" Ms Allen be removed from Sir Richard Eyre's working group, currently looking into the future of the Royal Opera House and its companies.

The select committee was scathing

about arrangements made by Sir Jeremy Isaacs and Sir Angus Stirling, his chairman, for the closure period.

"The disastrous misjudgements made then meant that the companies were condemned to a nomadic option which could have been avoided and which shows signs of being financially disastrous," the report said.

"The failures of the board in 1995 are responsible in considerable measure for the House's current crisis."

Letters, page 20

The Kaufman show takes centre stage

Full of fire, invective, mischievous wit and knowledgeable analysis, the select committee report reflects its author. Presiding over the weekly sessions of inquiry Gerald Kaufman has turned a parliamentary formality into the best show in town.

Go to any of the Culture, Media and Sport select committees and you will learn a little more each time about Mr Kaufman. At the inquiry into the Millennium Dome this week, Peter Mandelson made a prediction but ended his sentence with the words "touch wood". The Tories seized on this apparent slip. "Ah," ruled Mr Kaufman, "anyone remotely connected with the Jewish religion knows you end nearly every sentence with the words 'touch wood'."

The 67-year-old Mr Kaufman is a film buff, more likely to be seen at the National Film Theatre than the Royal Opera House, but certain to be seen regularly at both. This makes him a pretty rare bird among senior Labour MPs, as does the fact that he actually served as a minister pre-New Labour.

Bald and bespectacled, he comes across in the committee as an aesthetic all-rounder who is also determined to be seen as a man of the people. If Mr Kaufman has been the star of the proceedings, his constituents in Manchester have been in the wings. Ticket prices, travel to London - raise any such matter and Mr Kaufman will point out the difficulties for his constituents.

Extraordinarily polite and courteous on the surface, there is a harsher layer beneath. Hence the frequent sotto voce interjections which can be devastating. When told how Genista McIntosh resigned from the Royal Opera House as chief executive because of ill health but was then seen on an Arts Council trip to Nottingham, he almost sighed: "Her health appears to fluctuate."

Those who know Kaufman well are not surprised. "There is a difference between the public and private faces," said one long-time colleague. "He can be absolutely brutal behind the scenes, effective but brutal."

As chairman, Mr Kaufman will be listened to by ministers. But no one should assume that his wishes become reality. A few years ago his committee was scathing about CD prices. The record companies listened - and put them up. — David Lister

IN TOMORROW'S INDEPENDENT

Film and pop in your 32 page Eye on Friday



Stallone:
How did he get it so wrong?

THE EYE



RIP: The Hollywood star THE EYE

Mark E. Smith: after The Fall THE EYE

CAST OF CHARACTERS IN A COVENT GARDEN DRAMA



SIR JEREMY ISAACS
He left the Royal Opera House with a knighthood and an contract giving him £10,000 a month for nearly a year after he departed. But Sir Jeremy was the man behind the closure plans, criticised by the committee as "abysmal", and he and his chairman Sir Angus Stirling oversaw many of the managerial structures that the new regime inherited. He worked hard at ROH to end restrictive union practices and build up the companies. But his complaints of underfunding as the root of all problems are undermined by criticisms of him in the report.



MARY ALLEN
A former actress who once appeared in *The Rocky Horror Show*, she must think she is now living it. She ran the Watermans Arts Centre in Brentford before moving to the Arts Council where she was thought to be an effective secretary-general. But the manner of her move to the Royal Opera House - a post not advertised - shocked many including her Arts Council chairman, Lord Gowrie, who rufed afterwards that he had "bonded too closely with her". Her management skills which are already beginning to put the ROH finances in order might yet see her through this crisis.



LORD CHADLINGTON
Aka Peter Gummer, brother of John Selwyn and head of Shandwick, one of the biggest public relations firms and a former adviser to the Tory party. Smooth and unflappable, as chairman of the ROH, he too was involved in dispensing the £78m grant to the ROH when he was in charge of the Arts Council lottery fund. Chris Smith will not lightly forgive his bulldozing him into accepting the Mary Allen appointment. Lord Chadlington says he is determined to continue at the ROH, but the odds of a long stay under Labour are not good.



VIVIEN DUFFIELD
The heiress daughter of the businessman Charles Clore, the founder of the Sears empire, the 51-year-old chief fund raiser at the ROH is the best in the business. Insiders say she has been one of the most powerful voices in Covent Garden, and in warning that sponsors and other Covent Garden regulars would not follow the companies to Hammersmith and other London venues she has been proved right. The select committee goes out of its way to exclude her from criticism.



LORD GOWRIE
The earl who grew up at Windsor Castle and was a Tory arts minister before resigning because it did not pay well enough. A director of Sotheby's, he was the chairman of the Arts Council when the ROH got its massive grant and anticipated a badlash against lottery awards to high-art institutions by making sure the ROH got in first. He was "gozmoaked" when Mary Allen left for the ROH, and said afterwards he regretted "bonding too closely with my chief executive." He will quit the Arts Council for reasons unrelated to the opera house inquiry.

Diana's lawyers try to block TV film

The lawyers who are trying to trademark the image of Diana, Princess of Wales, are attempting to block the production of a TV film about her life.

Mishcon de Roy's has threatened legal action against Mirror Television over its attempt to make a film called "People's Princess" without permission from Diana's estate.

But Kelvin MacKenzie, Mirror Television's managing director and executive producer of the film, said the project would go ahead and described

the lawyers' move as "outrageous".

It is the first show of strength by Mishcon after its announcement this week that it had applied for trademark rights to images of the Princess, on behalf of Diana's estate and her Memorial Fund. The firm is also attempting to secure rights on the words "Diana, Princess of Wales". It says it is attempting to stop any future misuse, exploitation or commercialisation.

The lawyers said in a letter

to the producers: "It has been brought to our attention that you intend to produce a film entitled 'People's Princess'."

"No one has sought permission from Kensington Palace, the Spencer family or ourselves."

"You will appreciate that a film like this, produced so soon after the untimely death of both the Princess and Dodi Al Fayed, is entirely inappropriate and insensitive not only to their memories but also to their families."

The planned £1.5m film is a

production for LIVE TV, whose programmes include topless darts, the "News Bunny" the weather in Norwegian.

The film portrays Diana's search for personal happiness after the break-up of her marriage and fulfilment in her public role, despite harassment by the paparazzi. It ends as a Mercedes enters the Paris underpass.

Mr MacKenzie said the film would be a "tribute" to the late Princess and would be a story that "should and will be told".

— Ian Burrell

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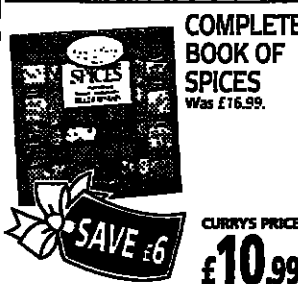
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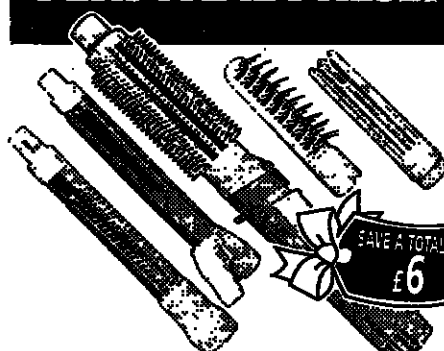
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IDEAS FOR THE HOME



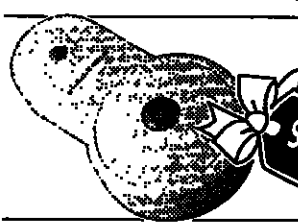
KEN HOM'S
5-Piece Wok Set
Wok available in Blue or Green.
Was £17.99.

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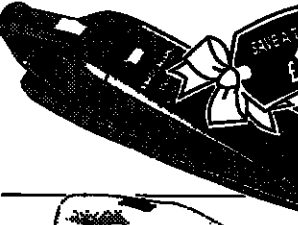
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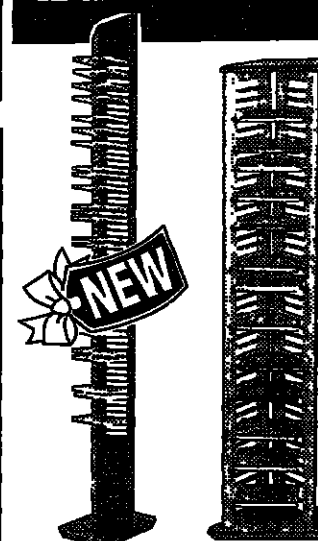
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IDEAS THAT STACK UP

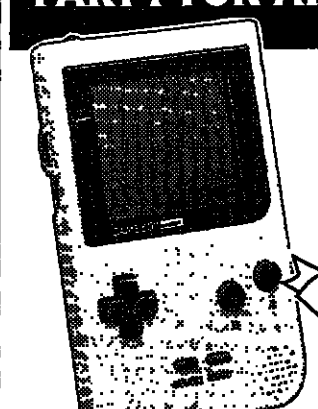


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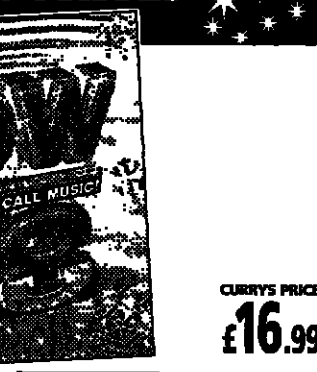
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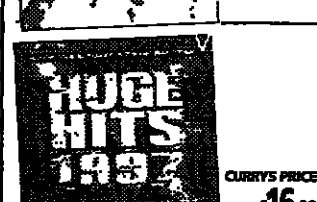
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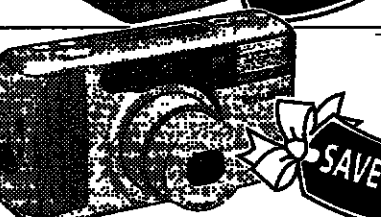
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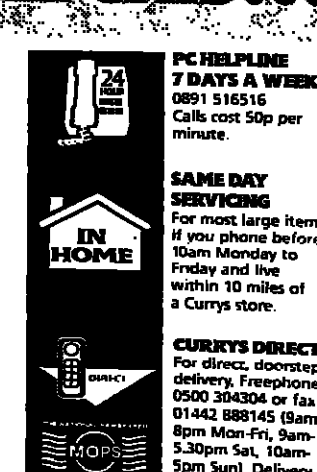
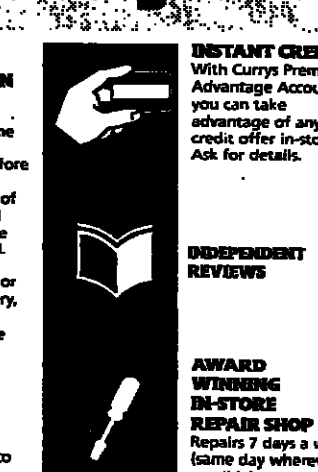
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Can Labour rid the streets of our fear of crime?

The Home Secretary published his flagship Bill to tackle crime and disorder. Anti-social behaviour, sex offenders and youth crime are among his targets. Michael Streeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent, assesses the proposals.

Jack Straw said yesterday that the yardstick to judge the Crime and Disorder Bill is whether it makes people feel "safer" in their communities.

Introducing a range of measures aimed at tackling the "anti-social" behaviour that leads to crime, Mr Straw said he wanted to shift the balance away from those elements undermining communities, such as youth gangs and problem neighbours.

"It is about giving power back to law-abiding people in society," he said.

The Bill's emphasis on controlling anti-social behaviour reinforces the Government's commitment to "zero-tolerance" policing, despite doubts raised this week in Cleveland, where the approach has been adopted.

A senior officer and main architect of the policy was suspended amid allegations of misconduct.

A key measure introduces



Age of anxiety: Mr Straw said that his Bill is about 'giving power back to law-abiding people in society'. Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

important provision is the new duty - included despite initial police opposition - on forces and local authorities to draw up crime reduction strategies in their areas.

Although the overall package will cost an estimated £120m a year to implement, ministers believe that it can save £180m from the prison bill through the electronic tagging and early release of 6,000 prisoners annually. Some experts think the final savings could be even higher, with an overall annual reduction in prison numbers potentially up to 7,000.

The measures will need 600 new probation officers to supervise sex offenders and violent criminals in the community following their release from prison. Alongside the Bill, the Court of Appeal will issue new guidelines on sentencing to ensure greater consistency in the way offenders are dealt with.

Many of the proposed schemes will be piloted before they apply nationally and the full impact of the measures should kick in by April 1999 - given them two years to have an impact before the next general election.

extended periods of supervision for sexual and violent offenders on their release from prison. Judges who feel that a convicted sex or violent offender may not be adequately dealt with through being let out on licence during their sentence can impose an "extension" sentence of close supervision on the offender. For sexual offences the period will be for up to 10 years, and violence five years. Police will also be able to apply to magistrates for orders against known sex offenders they feel

are a threat to the public. The Bill, which should come into force next autumn, also creates a new series of "racially aggravated" offences, including assault, harassment and public order offences. The offences will attract higher sentences.

Officials believe this will provide incentive for the police and prosecutors to unearth any racial motive behind crimes. Many parts of the Bill have been heavily trailed, including parenting orders to provide counselling sessions, enforce-

able orders against anti-social behaviour - backed by five-year jail sentences - child curfews, final warnings and detention and training orders for young offenders.

An unusual proposal is to allow remand hearings and other pre-trial hearings - where a defendant is in custody but not required by the court to attend the hearing - to be conducted through live television links between courts and prisons.

Many in the crime prevention business believe the most

Jury still out as America debates success of teenage curfews

Curfews aimed at keeping teenagers off the streets have angered civil liberties groups in the United States. But, as David Usborne finds out, most politicians and police chiefs like them.

More US cities than ever before have imposed strict curfews on teenagers in an effort to cut down on juvenile crime.

The rising popularity of the curfews among politicians and police chiefs is recorded in a new survey of 347 different US cities, each with populations of 30,000 or more, released this week by the US Conference of Mayors.

The report found that 276 of those cities now have curfews in place, a marked increase com-

pared with the last survey, conducted two years ago. Those cities said that juvenile crime had fallen by an average of 21 per cent since the curfews were put in place. In one case, it had dropped by 50 per cent.

The number of urban curfews in the US has been multiplying for several years and has coincided with a general hardening of attitudes towards crime. So far, however, none of the largest cities, like New York or Los Angeles, have attempted them.

Not all the cities surveyed voiced satisfaction with the experiment. A minority reported that youth crime had in fact increased since the curfews were enacted. Others complained that they were difficult and costly to implement.

Typically, the curfew laws require children of 18 years or under to be off the streets and in

their homes from 11 pm to 6 am. Violations are usually punishable by fines of up to \$500. Often a city will stipulate that parents of the children must pay the fines. Advocates of the curfews say this encourages parents to take greater responsibility.

The toughest of the laws also extend the curfews to day time hours. In an attempt to reduce school truancy, children are barred from public places during regular school hours.

Attempts by some cities to impose curfews have been thwarted by constitutional challenges. The American Civil Liberties Union argues that they violate the Bill of Rights.

Nor are all criminologists convinced of their value. "Curfews are a quick solution that don't do much," argues James Fox of Northeastern University in Boston. "They take up a lot of resources for little return."

Innocent man freed after 25 years in jail for murder

A soldier who spent 25 years in jail for murder had his conviction quashed. It is thought to be the longest period served by someone wrongly convicted. Michael Streeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent, considers the problems of adjusting to freedom and modern society.



Not guilty: Andrew Evans after being freed yesterday

When Andrew Evans was convicted of murdering a 14-year-old schoolgirl, Ted Heath was prime minister and decimal currency was still a novelty.

Yesterday, Mr Evans - who was just 17 when he was supposed to have battered Judith Roberts to death - was thrust back into the late 20th century after the Court of Appeal ruled that his conviction was unsafe and unreliable.

Campaigners for Mr Evans have now arranged for him to go to special safe accommodation and undergo counselling to come to terms his freedom.

Taking his first steps as a free man for quarter of a century, he said: "For more than 25 years I have been held responsible for a crime I did not commit. Today is the first step to a life beyond injustice."

His solicitor Kate Akster, of the human rights campaign group Justice, criticised the Home Office for not offering immediate compensation for

Mr Evans, whose rehabilitation is being funded through private donations. Describing the case as one of the most disturbing miscarriages of justice in recent times, where the legal process had exploited a vulnerable young man, she added: "We are calling for urgent changes to the arrangements for compensation in such cases."

Experts yesterday warned that Mr Evans' process of adapting from the regimented world of prison would be a long one. Dr James Thompson, a director of the Traumatic Stress Clinic, said people had to be convinced they could make decisions for themselves. Changes in society since 1973 would also need to be assimilated. "It is a very different world now, requiring different sorts of skills

... It's like an immigrant arriving in a new society."

At the time of Judith's murder in Tamworth, Staffordshire, in June 1972, Mr Evans - described as having had an unhappy childhood - was a soldier serving at Whittington Barracks just outside Lichfield. He was discharged on medical grounds and in October 1972 police called at his grandmother's house to ask him further questions over claims he had made about being in the barracks at the time of the killing.

He was later questioned at Tamworth police station and repeated that he did not know if he had killed the victim but kept seeing visions of her.

Later, as he waited for trial, experts became convinced he was suffering from amnesia - an unconscious mental mechanism by which painful events are obliterated from the memory - and a "truth drug" was administered before he made statements.

Lord Bingham said: "Judged by the rules and standards of today, the conduct of this investigation by the police left much to be desired."

"The appellant was not cautioned as and when he should have been, as is accepted by the Crown; he was not seen by a doctor when he first appeared at the police station, although it is clear that by current standards medical attention was urgently required; he was not offered the assistance of a solicitor."

A confession had been the sole reason for his conviction.

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Official tries to reassure women over smear scare

A woman has developed cervical cancer after a smear taken more than three years ago was misread, health officials disclosed yesterday. **Jeremy Lorraine, Health Editor, reports on another setback for the NHS cervical screening service**

Almost 4,000 smears screened at the Royal Berkshire Hospital between 1992 and 1994 have had to be re-checked after a woman was diagnosed with cervical cancer.

Six women with suspicious smears that were originally overlooked have been invited back for colposcopy examination (a visual check of the cervix with a microscope) and an-

other 65 are being advised to have a repeat smear.

The incident is the latest to beset the troubled NHS cervical screening service. Last month, Warwickshire health authority announced that 18,000 smears were being re-checked.

Berkshire health authority said the review applied to the work of one screener whose work was first investigated in 1994 after concerns were raised about the screener's performance.

In that investigation one in ten of the smears reported to be negative by the screener were checked, in line with the guidelines which applied at the time.

The conclusion of the investigation was that the screener's performance was "within acceptable standards".

However, the screener transferred to other duties and

never returned to screening.

After the case of cervical cancer came to light last month, the authority decided on a further review of the same screener's work which involved checking every negative smear she had passed, in line with the new guidelines applying today.

This disclosed the extra misread smears.

Dr Gary Bolger, acting director of public health, said: "We fully recognise that this is a worrying time for those women directly affected."

"Our objective has been to ensure they are followed up as quickly as possible and are given additional support and counselling if needed."

He said it was important that women retained confidence in the cervical screening programme. "I would like to reassure women that the laboratory at the Royal Ber-

shire Hospital is of a high standard. It meets all the nationally recommended targets for detecting abnormal smears and is overseen by a regional quality assurance programme."

A spokesman for the authority said that under new national quality control standards introduced this year, all smears are now subject to a rapid re-screen in which the findings of the primary screener are checked. Previously, only one in ten smears were re-screened.

In addition the spokesman said a new system to monitor the individual performance of screeners was now in place at the hospital.

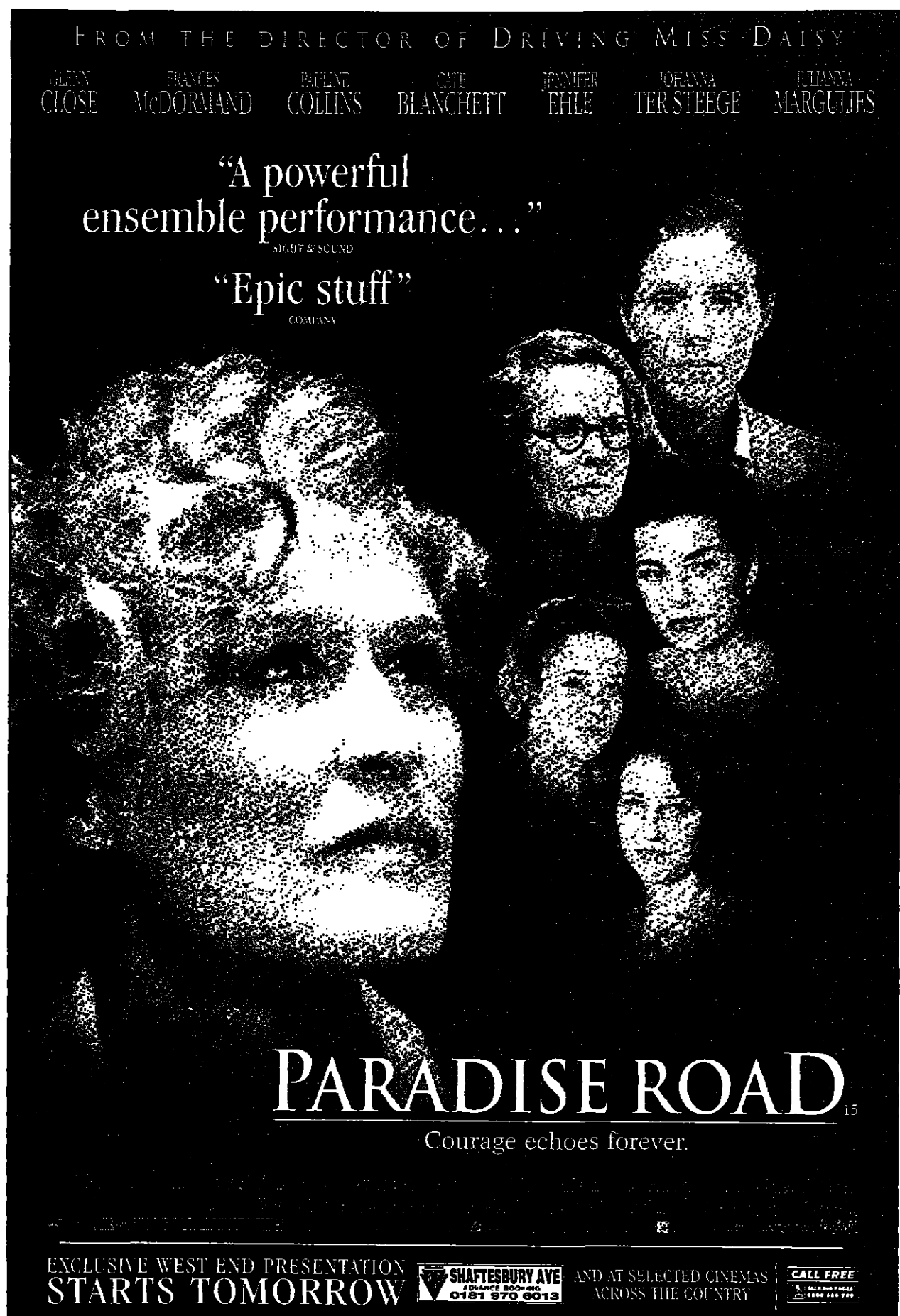
The health authority said yesterday that only women who had had a smear test between January 1992 and January 1994 and had not had a smear test since were affected by the review.

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£600,000 house on offer at £105



Bargain basement: Grace Trehan outside the eight-bedroom house in Oxford that she is putting up for grabs. Photograph: Tom Pilsten

Why would anyone want to buy a £600,000 Edwardian house for £105? It sounds a silly question, but it is precisely the one posed by an Oxfordshire woman who is selling her former home. Answers on a postcard - and it could be yours.

Grace Trehan is not bothering with estate agents. Instead she has devised a competition which, she hopes, will simultaneously raise £32,500 for homeless charities and £600,000 for the owners of the property. The prize - an eight bedroom Edwardian house in north Oxford - is, as it were, inbuilt.

Entrants must simply write a cheque for £105 and write between 50 and 75 words describing "why they need the house". The entries will be judged by an independent panel which will be looking for "an interesting, personal, persuasive account of why winning the house is so important".

The deadline has been set as 31 December with the winner due to be announced on 12 January. However, if the 6,500 entries needed to make the competition work are not collected by then, the date will be postponed a couple of months. £5 of every entry will go towards the unnamed homeless charities and after the £600,000 is raised for the owner any extra entry money will go to charity.

"I suddenly realised it would be much quicker to sell a house of this value by running a competition which offered the chance of a lifetime to the lucky winner," explained Mrs Trehan.

"So I volunteered my help and devised the contest, which is not a lottery or a raffle, but a competition of skill, in the hope that some of my favourite charities can benefit at the same time."

It is, she feels, well worth a gamble. "Some people spend that much when they go out with friends for dinner, or bet that much in a month or two on the lottery where the odds are about eight million to one to win," she said.

The semi-detached house, which is called Belmor, has a reception hall room, together with an additional 12 rooms, plus two kitchens and five bathrooms. The garden is walled and includes a fish pond, waterfall and fountain.

Mrs Trehan would like the house to go to "people who really need it." The idea of it being turned into a homeless hostel would be "really wonderful", she said. Sadly, however, this is not much of a clue. She is not on the panel of judges.

— Clare Garner

Woman minister quits over affair

A female Church of Scotland minister who was accused of having an affair with a married church elder has agreed to resign.

The Rev Helen Percy, 32, minister for six parishes in Angus, Perthshire, also agreed to seek counselling, and she will not now be liable for a church trial. However, she could regain her position in the future if the Church's General Assembly believes she is able to resume her duties.

The allegations of sexual misconduct came to light when a woman wrote to the Moderator of the Presbytery of Angus, claiming that Miss Percy was having an affair with her 52-year-old son. She was suspended in July, but it was not until last month that she admitted the affair.

Spencers divorced

The Earl and Countess Spencer were granted their divorce yesterday at the end of a six-minute court hearing in Cape Town. Lady Spencer was not in court to hear the final rites as Lord Spencer, 33, went into the witness box to declare that the marriage had broken down irretrievably.

Details of the settlement thrashed out on Monday were released after the hearing and revealed that Lady Spencer is to get a clean-break settlement of £1.8m.

Drug experts say Prozac is not addictive

A claim that the anti-depressant drug, Prozac, could be addictive was rejected yesterday by the Government body that licenses drugs in Britain.

The Medicines Commission dismissed as "flawed" a report by Charles Medawar, director of Social Audit, claiming "overwhelming evidence" that Prozac and similar anti-depressants known as SSRIs (selective serotonin uptake inhibitors) caused problems of dependence as great as tranquillisers such as Valium.

Mr Medawar says doctors have been led to believe that withdrawal reactions are very rare and that they may be mistaking the psychic distress caused by drug withdrawal for relapse, in the same way that they did with benzodiazepines like Valium 25 years ago.

The commission said withdrawal reactions had been noted with the SSRIs but they were rare and not associated with other symptoms of dependence.

— Jeremy Lorraine

Students strike in fees protest

Thousands of students at Edinburgh University failed to appear at classes yesterday in a protest strike against the introduction of tuition fees.

Organisers of the event estimated that just 15 per cent of the university's 17,000 students attended lectures, forcing many departments to abandon work for the day. The history department was also closed in support of the day of action.

A spokeswoman for the university denied, however, that there had been major disruption to classes.

About 5,000 postcards protesting against the imposition of fees were signed by students and staff members, and will be delivered to 10 Downing Street.

Top-class shelter

Homeless young people will swap the pavements for the comfort of a posh London address thanks to a scheme which got the go-ahead yesterday.

Westminster Council has given the Cabinet Office permission to transform Admiralty Arch, at the corner of Trafalgar Square, into a hostel for the homeless this winter. Renovation of the 86-year-old building is expected to be completed in time for the hostel to open later this month.

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Farmers join fightback after latest 'body blow'

The announcement was, as one British farmer put it, 'a body blow to an industry on its knees'. As farmers across England and Scotland began following Wales's lead and fighting back in the manner of French lorry drivers, Tony Heath and Clare Garner listened to their anger at the latest beef ban.

Farmers last night stepped up their campaign to prevent the importation of foreign beef and staged demonstrations in protest against the Government's latest ban on sales of beef on the bone because of BSE fears.

As farmers began driving tractors and trailers through Newton Abbot in Devon in protest at cheap imports, others reacted with anger and disbelief to the latest blow to hit the industry. Richard Barter,

who has 127 cattle on his farm at Bovey Tracey in south Devon, said: "This could be the end of the line. The cost of boning is going to be put back on to the farmer."

Mr Barter, who said his family had been farming in the area since 1300, added: "We are not making any money now, how are we going to cope?"

David Hill, who rears 400 animals on his north Devon farm, said he was "astonished" by the announcement.

"What concerns me primarily is that I am told 5 per cent of meat is currently on the bone. That does not sound a lot, but the announcement is bound to spread uncertainty in the mind of the housewife who is already confused as to whether to buy beef," he said.

It would lead to lower beef sales which were already at a level where he knew he could not make a profit in the coming year, he added.

While Ron Davies, the Secretary of State for Wales, was holding crisis talks with leaders



Taking the high road: A convoy of tractors block the main street in Newton Abbot, Devon, yesterday. Photograph: Richard Austin

of the Farmers' Union of Wales and the National Farmers' Union in London, more than 200 Welsh farmers blockaded the west Wales port of Fishguard in an effort to stop Irish beef reaching the British market.

When the ferry from Rosslare docked they refused to allow the departure of three lorries carrying produce from the Republic. The vehicles were reloaded for the ferry's return voyage.

Earlier, six vehicles carrying Irish meat were met by more than 500 farmers blockading Holyhead, in Wales. They were refused entry - as was a seventh vehicle because although it was

transporting fruit the lorry was owned by a haulier who transports meat.

A meeting late last night near the Anglesey port was predicted to attract up to 1,000 farmers.

It is becoming clear that since the first protest on Sunday night, when 40 tonnes of

Irish beefburgers were thrown into Holyhead harbour, farmers believe that conventional channels are failing to resolve problems claimed to threaten the whole fabric of rural Wales.

Meanwhile, the Scots were following suit. Beef producers in Scotland were last night staging a demonstration at Stran-

raer, an entry port for beef from Ireland. The protest was organised by Wigtown farmers who say it is an "outrage" that cheap imports should be happening in "Europe's so-called Single Market".

George Lyon, vice-president of the the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, accompa-

nied other senior officials and union members at the demonstration. He said: "Our members in the south-west of Scotland have had to bear the sight of fleets of lorries carrying Irish imports into Scotland."

"Our hands are tied behind our backs and these cheap imports are underpinned by aid from the Irish government and the European Commission."

Elsewhere, farmers picketed supermarkets at Wrexham and Middlewich in Cheshire, while at Fishguard, Pembrokeshire, more than 200 farmers succeeded in turning back three refrigerated lorries which contained chicken and dairy products but not beef.

The supermarket chain Tesco reacted to the Government announcement by withdrawing all fresh beef products on the bone from the shelves.

Andrew Batty, the company's commercial director, said customers who had purchased any fresh beef would be offered a full refund.

"Our first priority is our customers and Tesco meat is produced to the highest standards available."

"We are taking this action immediately to demonstrate our commitment to the safety of the products we sell," he said.

Chefs enraged by restriction say quality cooking will suffer

Britain's leading restaurateurs expressed outrage last night about the Government's ban on beef sold on the bone, claiming it will destroy some of our greatest culinary traditions, writes Nicole Voosh.

It was a sad day for quality cooking, gourmet chef Michel Roux said. The owner of the Michelin two-star restaurant Le Gavroche told *The Independent* that: "All the beef I buy is hung on the bone because it is so much better to cook with - nothing else ever tastes quite the same. The bone can be removed after cooking, but not before because you just lose all the flavour."

Most chefs say that they prefer beef on the bone because it maintains joint succulence and tenderises the meat. They also use beef or veal bones when making stock, which is then added to an extensive range of dishes, including risotto.

"Without doubt this will affect my cooking," Mr Roux said. "It is a real shame for food lovers everywhere, especially as we still sell an awful lot of beef."

Raymond Blanc, celebrity chef and owner of Le Manoir aux Quat Saisons, said: "This ban is so ridiculous it enrages me. Banning beef on the bone

is like banning tomatoes from cooking."

"It will undoubtedly put a stop to tradition and prevent the practice of cooking as a craft. How will we ever achieve excellence with these negative rules?"

Wayne Tapscott, head chef at City Rhodes - owned by television star Gary Rhodes - also mourned the passing of much-loved traditional cookery fare. "I am absolutely shocked that we won't be able to cook Gary's classic



Raymond Blanc: Furious at 'ridiculous' ban

braised oxtail dish again," he said. "It was always so popular with customers and you will never be able to achieve that taste with any other substitute."

The ban is also set to hit restaurants at the other end of the culinary scale. American-themed restaurants - who have made T-bone steaks and rack of beef ribs fashionable again - along with traditional British steak houses will be affected.

The Beefeater chain has already withdrawn T-bone steaks from their menu.

Many supermarkets, including Tesco, Marks & Spencer and Waitrose - which sell less than 5 per cent boned beef between them - have cleared the offending products from the shelves.

A spokesman for Marks & Spencer said: "We only ever sell two beef products which have bone in them and the ribs are only on sale nearer Christmas. However, we have withdrawn both from sale and we will have to cancel Christmas orders for the rib of beef as a result."

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food also confirmed that the ban extends to stock cubes and gravy granules, including the Sunday dinner stalwart, the Oxo cube.

Helen Park, spokeswoman for Oxo, said: "Our cubes do contain ground beef bone, but it is from Sweden, a country where there has never been a reported case of BSE [bovine spongiform encephalopathy]."

"Obviously in the light of this announcement we will be seeking to consult industry and consumer groups before coming to any decision about the future of the Oxo cube."

Health fears as bonemeal mountain grows

A stockpile of meat and bonemeal from cattle culled under the 30-month scheme to eradicate BSE would be as high as 36 Big Bens and is growing at the rate of 2,000 tons a week.

Jeff Rooker, the agriculture minister, said efforts were being made to speed up the disposal of the bonemeal after protests by Labour MPs over health fears from constituents living near hangars which are being used for storage.

Mr Rooker gave an assurance that there would be no cutting of corners to speed up the planning process and reduce the beef and bonemeal mountain by allowing more incinerators to be built to deal with the backlog.

"No decisions have yet been taken on other major disposal options, including burning meat and bonemeal in power stations.

Full weight will be given to the protection of the environment and human health in making any decisions. The Government will not cut corners in this exercise," he said.

A total of 1.9 million cattle which were perfectly healthy and not showing any signs of BSE had been slaughtered under the 30-month scheme, Mr Rooker told MPs. It had resulted in 150,000 tons of tallow and 280,000 tons of meat and bonemeal in stores around the country awaiting disposal.

"It's growing at the rate of about 2,000 tons a week. To give members some idea of the volume, it is the equivalent of 36 Big Bens," he said. "It is a very considerable volume."

The minister stressed that BSE-infected meat and bonemeal was incinerated without storage. But he said there would

be an investigation into alleged breaches of storage licences raised by Swindon MPs, led by Julia Drown, Labour MP for South Swindon, at the storage of bonemeal close to residents in hangars that were infested with rats and open to the elements.

"The desperate plight of the victims of CJD and the economic crisis BSE has caused for farmers are well known ... But we all must recognise that the general public remain worried about the consequences for them."

"It is simply not adequate for experts to satisfy themselves there are no public health risks. The public need to be reassured this is the case," Michael Willis, the Labour MP for Swindon North, said.

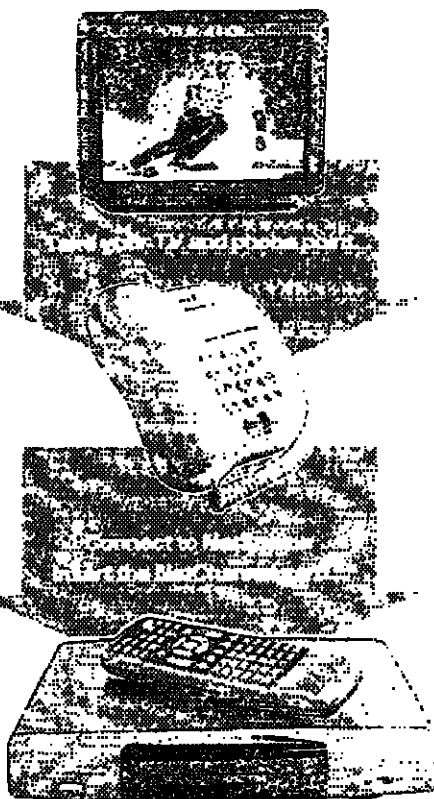
— Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

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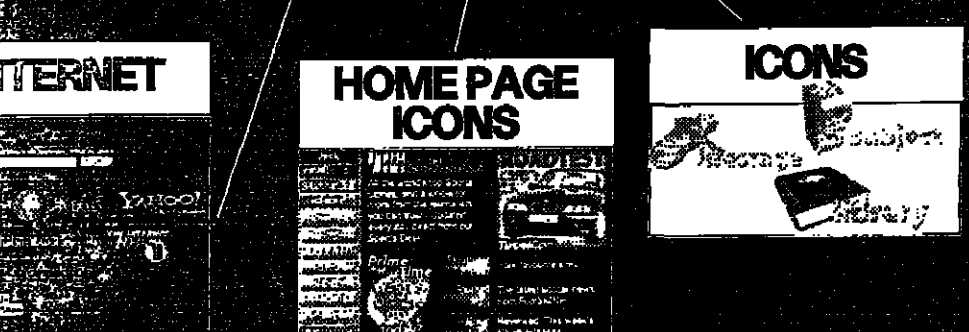
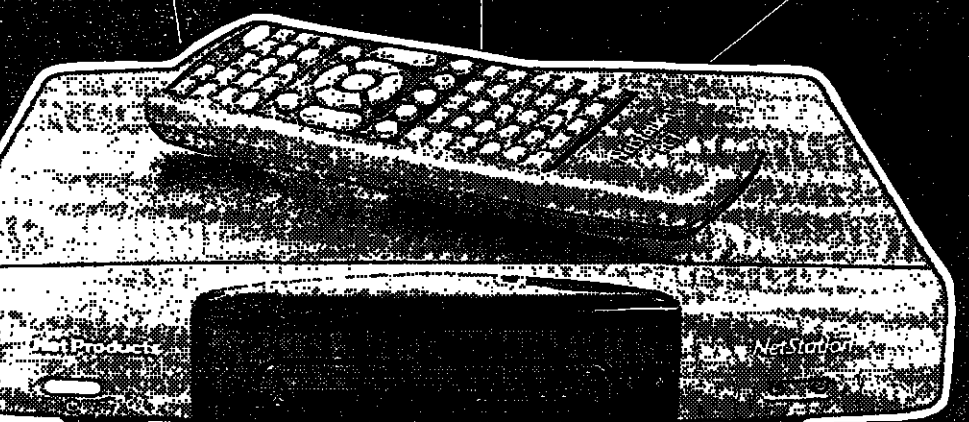
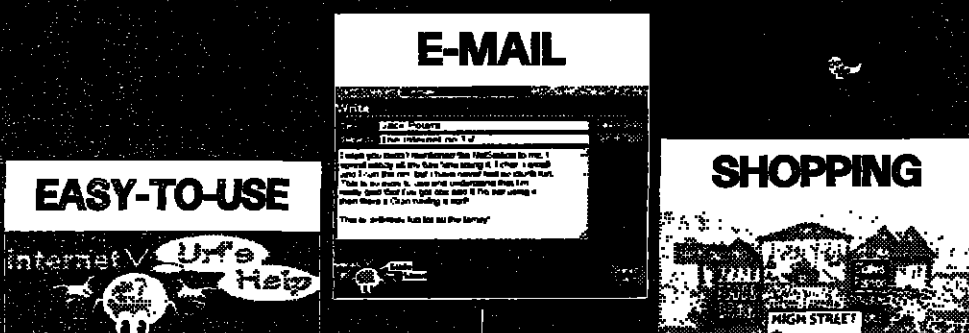
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9/EDUCATION

Football clubs kick off bid to help pupils with homework

Young people will be able to do their homework at football grounds after three top clubs agreed to join a government scheme. Judith Judd, Education Editor, looks at a novel way for pupils to achieve their goals.

Newcastle United, Leeds United and Sheffield Wednesday are the first to sign up for the £6m scheme which aims to motivate pupils through sport.

Pupils aged nine to 14 who need extra help with the 3Rs will be invited to the clubs which will offer literacy, numeracy and IT in purpose-built classrooms. Girls as well as boys will be lured by their enthusiasm for football, ministers hope.

Brian Philpot, Newcastle United's representative in the scheme, said: "The power of football clubs in the local community should never be underestimated. Girls at this age are probably more interested in football than boys."

The scheme will be funded by the Government, which is offering £2m, and by local authorities, business and the clubs. Next year, the Government hopes that the vast majority of Premier League and First Division clubs will join in.

All three clubs in the scheme, which starts next term, will select children with the help of local teachers. In Newcastle, regular attendance at five of the city's existing homework clubs and the achievement of attendance and punctuality targets set by schools will be among the criteria.

At least 500 pupils a year are

expected to visit each centre after school and on Saturday mornings. In Sheffield, pupils will attend for eight weeks, three times a week.

The centres will be staffed by qualified teachers and university and college students.

Phil McBride, a former deputy head, who will run the Newcastle centre and Sue Beeley, a modern languages teacher, who will head the Sheffield one, were given certificates by David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education. Mr Blunkett, a lifelong Wednesday fan, said: "Study centres in Premier League clubs... will attract young people who could otherwise remain disaffected with education."

"Although more and more girls are interested in football nowadays, these centres will act as a magnet for boys who tend to under-achieve in the three Rs."

Mr Blunkett visited Chelsea's Stamford Bridge stadium to explain the scheme to Pele, the Brazilian football star, now Brazil's sports minister.

Asked whether hard-working children who were not under-achievers might feel they were being left out of the new venture, Mr Blunkett said: "In the past egalitarians have said if you can't provide it for everybody, don't provide it for anybody. We don't hold with that."

He acknowledged that not all young people are excited by football. Eventually, he hoped, homework clubs would be provided at non-sporting venues.

Paul Forbes, of Leeds City Council, suggested children might meet players as a reward for doing well on the scheme. The club hoped to ensure that players "popped in" when their commitments allowed.



Sir Pele lends his support

Pele, the legendary former Brazilian footballer, with Tony Banks, the sports minister, at Stamford Bridge in south-west London yesterday to learn about the football-related scheme to encourage children to do their homework.

Pele, who is now his country's sports minister, is visiting Britain with the Brazilian president, Fernando Cardoso. The Duke of Kent accompanied the pair to the ground, the home of Chelsea FC.

Earlier, Pele, who has three World Cup winners medals, picked up two new medals when he received an honorary Knight Commander of the British Empire from the Queen. After the ceremony at Buckingham Palace, Pele said: "It's a big responsibility. I thank the British people for their trust in me."

LEAs want more say on heads

Local authority leaders are planning to sponsor an amendment to the Education Bill published today to win greater control for councils over the appointment of head teachers.

Authorities will also ask Tony Blair to intervene personally in their attempt to increase their say in the selection of heads, which currently falls entirely to school governors.

Without tight controls, they claim, standards could be jeopardised, despite Government moves to improve training for heads. Ministers have acknowledged that the management of a school is the key factor in its success.

However, the Bill, which will give local education authorities new powers to help drive up standards in schools, as well as creating a new schools framework, is expected to do no more than allow councillors to write to governors requesting a change of heart if they are unhappy about a choice of head.

LEA leaders insist the move does not go far enough, and are seeking powers to veto appointments they consider unsuitable or to approve shortlists of candidates.

The Local Government Association also wants selection panels to include two repre-

sentatives from outside schools' governing bodies, including experienced governors from other schools or head teachers from other authorities.

LGA education chairman Graham Lane claimed that governors often ignored advice given by education officers. He said: "The Government is suggesting we write to governors and say 'think again' when they have already made an appointment. But we want to get the appointment right first time."

LEAs themselves face takeover by Government "hit-squads", under today's Bill, if they are considered to be failing to drive up school standards.

The legislation will also pave the way for the creation of a new framework for schools, involving the abolition of Tory-created grant-maintained status.

Ministers were forced into partial retreat in October over plans for Church schools after bishops threatened to delay the Bill in the House of Lords. The concessions included an increase in the number of Church governors in aided schools.

The Tories will oppose the scrapping of GM status, claiming the move represents an onslaught on parental choice.

— Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

Teachers believe basic skills targets are unrealistic

Only one in 10 primary school head teachers is convinced that government targets on driving up standards in the three Rs are achievable, according to a poll published today.

The maths and English targets, on which the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, has staked his job, will require "substantial" extra funding if they are to succeed, heads say.

The findings come on the same day as another survey says that primary teachers want more time to spend on literacy and numeracy. The study, carried out for the National Association of Schoolmasters' Union of Women Teachers, shows that more than three-quarters of teachers agreed the National Curriculum for primaries is overcrowded, while the vast majority want more time to concentrate on basic skills.

Of 1,037 heads questioned in the first survey, almost two-thirds believe plans to ensure that 80 per cent of 11-year-olds are reaching acceptable standards in English by the end of this Parliament will founder without more money. Another quarter are still uncertain whether success is possible.

Almost as many believe the target of 75 per cent of the age group being on track in maths is unrealistic.

The doubts expressed in the study, conducted for the National Association of Head Teachers and the BBC education programme *Just One Chance*, prompted Mr Blunkett to renew his pledge to resign if the goals are not met within a five-year timetable.

But heads had failed to understand the size of the Government's investment in schools, he told the programme — broadcast tonight.

— Lucy Ward



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Bibi's hairdresser, the wife, the lover and the suicide

Nobody knows who fired first but by the time the shooting ended, David Afuta, hairdresser to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, and his girlfriend, Anat Elimelech, had died. Patrick Cockburn reports from Jerusalem on a double killing that has gripped the nation.

The potential for violence is everywhere in Israel, but Israelis were still shocked to learn that David Afuta, 38, hairdresser to Benjamin and Sarah Netanyahu, had died after being shot twice in the chest. Beside him, shot with a single bullet in his apartment in Jerusalem, was Anat Elimelech, 23, his girlfriend and a successful model, who had been intending to leave him.

Nobody knows who shot first and afterwards committed suicide. Investigators say there were signs of a struggle before the shots were fired. "I am absolutely stunned and shocked," said Sarah Netanyahu. "I think that disagreements of all types should be solved by discussion."

Police investigators are divided about what happened during the last moments of the couple. They had been together for six

years, but Ms Elimelech was frustrated that Mr Afuta's previous wife, by whom he had two children, was refusing to give him a divorce.

When she threatened to leave him Mr Afuta threatened to kill her. Earlier this week he called a friend from his rented apartment at Beit Hakarem Heights, in Jerusalem, and told him: "I'm in a serious depression."

Ms Elimelech was appearing on a television show and only arrived home at 8am. Police say the two had an argument. Three shots were heard. Mr Afuta's brother and Ms Elimelech's father had tried and failed to get them on the phone in the apartment.

The two families, knowing the tension between the two, tried to get into the apartment and, when the door was not answered, broke in through roof and found the bodies.

Police investigators are divided about exactly what happened. Mr Afuta had been depressed and threatened her because she wanted to leave him. He was strong and a good shot and might have been able to shoot himself twice after killing her. On the other hand, the gun was powerful and was found near Ms Elimelech's hand. One of his friends was quoted as saying she was angry because "he wasted money and she was forced to support him."



Mr Afuta and Ms Elimelech, who died in what was said to be a murder-suicide Photograph: AP

Yeltsin woos Swedes with tales of big military cuts

The US agreed to boost support for Moscow's push to slash and reform its armed forces, hours after President Boris Yeltsin promised big military cuts. His announcement during a visit to Sweden overshadowed the event at Nato headquarters, where the US Defense Secretary, William Cohen, and Marshal Igor Sergeev signed an agreement to increase exchanges of military officers.

"They are going through a very painful time right now," Mr Cohen said, referring to the Russian forces under stringent budget measures. "It is important to help in any way we can in a positive, constructive fashion." Mr Yeltsin told the Swedish parliament that Russia would cut its land and naval forces by 40 per cent beginning in 1999, "especially in north-western Russia." The Foreign Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, hastened to clarify that the 40-per-cent cut referred only to the north-western region.

Reuters - Brussels

Door clue to ferry tragedy

A report yesterday blamed technical factors for the 1994 Estonia ferry disaster, in which 852 people died, but implied more could have been done by the crew and rescuers. The Estonia sank in rough seas off the Finnish coast on 27 September three years ago. It was Europe's worst maritime disaster since the Second World War. The report, by a three-nation commission, said the main factor behind the sinking was weak locking of the ferry's bow door, which was jolted open.

A lawyer for Meyer Werft, the German yard that built the Estonia, said it had sailed for 14 years without problems before the accident, arguing that the report was based on theoretical models. A lawyer for a group representing families of Swedish victims said he was dissatisfied with the report and called for a new inquiry.

Reuters - Tallinn

Meat irradiation approved

The US Food and Drug Administration has approved irradiation of red meat and sausages to reduce the risk of poisoning, four months after the closure of Hudson Foods, in Nebraska, one of the country's biggest meat-processing plants, following an outbreak of E coli.

The FDA said it was satisfied irradiation was safe, did not "demonstrably" alter the nutritional content of food, and did not change flavour or texture. Irradiation is already approved for poultry and fruit and vegetables in the US; treated produce must be labelled as such.

Mary Dejevsky - Washington

Sharif thanks army

The Pakistani government yesterday praised the army for its role in solving the political crisis that led to the resignation of President Farooq Leghari in a victory for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's ruling Muslim League.

"The Pakistan Army played a positive role to stabilise the situation and demonstrated a commendable commitment to the constitution, rule of law and democratic political system," the Information Minister, Mushahid Hussain, said.

It was the first time Mr Sharif's government had publicly acknowledged the support which Western diplomats believed the powerful military gave to end weeks of constitutional paralysis.

The army itself made no comment on its role. Last week, it denied having any designs on power after media reports suggested that a return to martial law, last in force in 1985, was imminent because of the standoff between Mr Sharif and the judiciary and president.

Earlier yesterday, Ajmal Mian was sworn in as acting chief justice. Mr Mian was ordered to act as an interim chief justice after a bench suspended chief justice Sajjad Ali Shah on Tuesday. Mr Shah's removal prompted the resignation on Tuesday of Mr Leghari, who had been at odds with Mr Sharif for months in a power struggle that threatened constitutional breakdown.

Reuters, Islamabad

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صكتا من الامل

Is it El Nino, or just another cold winter?

The weather phenomenon known as El Nino, which caused a devastating drought in South-east Asia and floods in east Africa, is also disrupting the climate of Europe, according to scientists at an environment conference in Japan. Richard Lloyd Parry in Kyoto assesses the evidence.

Pacific, and unusual dryness in southern Africa and Central and South America.

In South-east Asia, there was a severe drought causing serious food shortages in New Guinea and contributing to forest fires in Indonesia which enveloped the whole region in a choking smog. A subsequent warming of the Indian Ocean has led to devastating floods in Somalia and southern Ethiopia. But far from being confined to the tropics, El Nino has also had pronounced effects in Europe, according to unpublished work circulating among scientists at the Kyoto conference.

Scientists at the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting in Reading have produced computer models which attempt to iron out random weather variations to isolate the specific effects of El Nino. Compared to North America, Asia and Oceania, the impact of the phenomenon on Europe has in the past been considered mild. But the strength of this year's event has made it easier to distinguish between the genuine El Nino "signal" and the run-of-the-mill fluctuations in weather known to meteorologists as "background noise".

Projections for previous months have been shown by subsequent weather to be accurate: for December, January and February, the computer model suggests that El Nino will contribute to unusually warm, wet weather in the southern part of Britain, especially in Cornwall.

The remarkable range of the effects of El Nino have long been known, but until now scientists have been uncertain about its effects on Europe. According to Dr Anver Ghazi, head of the European Commission's Climate and Natural Hazards Unit, which is funding the research, the effects of El Nino appear also to have contributed to the rain which caused devastating floods in central Europe this summer.

New research suggests that summer floods in Germany, and even this week's snow in Britain, have both been influenced by the El Nino effect which is likely to generate a wet, relatively warm winter in England, especially in the South-west.

The phenomenon is the subject of much discussion at the United Nations conference on climate change being held in Kyoto. The aim of the gathering, attended by delegates from more than 160 countries, is to reach a global agreement on quotas for the reduction of greenhouse gases, which are believed to cause global warming.

Despite circumstantial evidence, there is no scientific consensus yet on whether the gases, principally carbon dioxide, have exacerbated El Nino. But the research offers striking examples of the effect seemingly small variations in temperature can have on the weather of places thousands of miles apart, an alarming foreshadowing of the potential effects of global warming.

The climatological "event" known as El Nino is a periodic rise in the temperature of the eastern Pacific, around Peru and the Galapagos Islands. There was a strong El Nino in 1982 and 1983, and a lesser version of the phenomenon was observed throughout the late 1990s. This summer, however, saw the most powerful El Nino on record, resulting in heavy rain in the eastern

CLIMATE TEAM HAS ITS WORK CUT OUT

The Climate and Natural Hazards Unit was only supposed to last until 1999 - it was set up by the European Commission in 1994 as a four-year experiment. If the past 12 months have been anything to go by, it has a long and busy future ahead of it: 1997 has been one of the most disaster-rich years in recent European memory.

The Unit carries out research on three different hazards - hydrological risk, earthquakes, forest fires and volcanoes. Europe's volcanoes have been relatively quiet, but in every other category there has been a bumper crop, with massive flooding in Germany, a big earthquake in Italy, and forest fires in Spain and the south of France.

The Unit has published research on ways of reducing flood risk, identifying various problems. European seismologists and engineers have exchanged information with their Japanese colleagues since the Assisi earthquake, and a method has been developed for measuring forest fires and predicting their likely direction.



The El Nino effect: The carnage after floods swept southern France, killing four people Photograph: Reuters

Greenhouse gas linked to weather system

"To me, it's just like a pot on the fire," says Bekuretsion Kassahun. "You think the heat is being distributed evenly, but there's always one part which heats up more quickly than the rest. That's what El Nino is - I believe that it's caused by global warming, and that it's just the first place, the very beginning of the effects which are going to be felt."

Mr Kassahun is probably in a minority at the environment conference in Kyoto - science has yet to establish an indisputable connection between El Nino and the warming of the planet caused by carbon dioxide emissions. But, as a meteorologist for the Ethiopian government, he has more immediate reason to worry than most. This year, southern Ethiopia has suffered devastating floods which have killed more than 100 people and displaced up to 200,000 others. In neighbouring Somalia, the situation is many times worse. And there is little doubt that the rains are the result of a rise in the temperature of the Indian Ocean caused by El Nino.

What causes El Nino is another matter, and the official literature is tantalisingly vague. According to the United Nations' World Meteorological Organisation which gave a presentation on the subject in Kyoto yesterday, "it is the very complex interaction between the ocean and the atmosphere that determines the onset and termination of El Nino events."

Huge volcanic eruptions which block out the sun with large quantities of ash may or may not influence them, and a link between El Nino and global warming "has not been confirmed by research". But if the mounting consensus among scientists about the progress of global warming is correct, then El Nino may very well be giving a foretaste of what the world has in store.

If greenhouse gases, principally carbon dioxide, double by the end of the next century, average temperatures could rise by 3.5C, with correspondingly dramatic consequences. Greenhouse gas emissions have increased steadily throughout the 20th century and so have the intensity and frequency of El Nino "events".

— Richard Lloyd Parry

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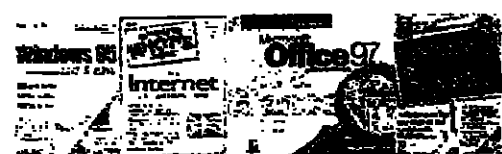
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Berlusconi convicted of fiddle

Former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi was convicted of business malpractice yesterday, raising doubts about his political future.

Berlusconi received a 16-month suspended sentence for false accounting over the acquisition of the Italian film company Medusa by his Fininvest media empire in 1987. He was also fined 60 million lire (around £25,000) for his role in artificially inflating the price of Medusa and siphoning off the difference.

The conviction was significant because it was a clear rejection of Berlusconi's argument that he was not responsible for everything in his business empire. It bodes ill for his fortunes in two other ongoing corruption trials.

The main damage is likely to be political, however. Following a string of municipal election defeats, the knives are out in the centre-right opposition for its leadership, and Mr Berlusconi in particular.

— Andrew Gumbel

How I killed to please 'Mummy'

Mary Braid in Johannesburg heard the testimony of the man who 'finished off' Stompie Moeketsi, the appallingly battered 14-year-old victim of Winnie Mandela's bodyguards.

"I loved Mama with all my heart," said Jerry Richardson, 49, convicted killer and former "coach" of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's notorious Mandela United Football Club. "I would have done anything to please her."

Anything, he testified, included murder. On the eighth day of public hearings into murder and assault allegations against Mrs Mandela and her vigilante "club", which terrorised Soweto in the late 1980s, it was the turn of the man who once led the team to tell his story.

Richardson told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission he had killed four people on Mummy's (the members' term of endearment for Mrs Mandela) orders.

"Mummy never killed anyone," said Richardson, serving life for the 1989 murder of activist Stompie Seipei Moeketsi. "But she used us to kill a lot of people."

He said Stompie, whose kidnap Mrs Mandela was convicted of, was killed on Mama's instructions. Like Stompie, Soweto youths Lolo Sono and Sibuisiso Shabalala were murdered after being accused of spying. The fourth victim, Kuki Zwane, was killed because she would not end her relationship with Sizwe Sithole, the father of Mrs Mandela's grandchild.

Even after days of harrowing testimony,

Richardson's evidence read like a horror movie in which he was psychopathic killer at the slavish bidding of a violent mistress. He said that when he killed Stompie it had been a matter of "finishing him off". The boy was already almost dead from a beating at Mrs Mandela's home. He had been thrown into the air seven times and kicked "like a football". Mrs Mandela, 63, had joined in with sjambok and fists.

The detail was too much for Stompie's mother Joyce. She let out a cry and was led from the hall weeping. With so much focus on what the hearings mean for Mrs Mandela's political career, it was a reminder that they are also about the suffering of the weak at the hands of the powerful.

Richardson's story supports assault accusations against Mrs Mandela by other witnesses but contradicts former team member Katiza Cebekhulu's claim that he saw Mrs Mandela stabbing Stompie.

There was laughter when Richardson was asked why he was applying for amnesty. "I'm trying my luck," he said. After days in which so few witnesses have seemed to tell all they know, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, TRC chairman, said wryly: "There is some honesty, at least."

But Mrs Mandela could also afford to laugh. Richardson, like other accusers, would hardly make a credible prosecution witness in a court. That fact might have had something to do with the arrival of three cabinet ministers and a provincial premier at yesterday's hearing. It was the largest show of support so far from the ANC, apparently still hedging its bets on Mrs Mandela's survival. Today, she will have her say.



More than 1,000 tour guides releasing doves at Queen Hatshepsut's temple near Luxor, Egypt, in memory of the 62 people who died in last month's massacre. Photograph: Amr Nabil/APP

Spanish joy over Rock

Spain's Foreign Minister, Abel Matutes, yesterday hailed as "a triumph for Spanish diplomacy" Britain's decision on Tuesday to set aside the dispute over Gibraltar and approve Nato's plan to streamline its command structure. Britain had earlier argued that Spain must lift its restrictions on air and naval movements around Gibraltar to be fully integrated into the alliance.

Mr Matutes said Britain, at the Nato meeting in Brussels, had lifted its reservations "without any condition whatsoever. Meanwhile, Spain retains its air and naval restrictions on the military use of the Rock."

British and Spanish officials meet in Madrid tomorrow. Mr Matutes said: "Spain would like to start making concessions and lifting the restrictions, in exchange for progress in this whole process of recuperating Spanish sovereignty."

A Foreign Office spokesman said yesterday: "Britain has lifted its reserve on the principle of Nato enlargement, but we will block work to implement the Spanish and Gibraltar aspects of the new structure until acceptable arrangements are agreed for Gibraltar."

— Elizabeth Nash, Madrid

French left poo-poops Blair

A French Socialist minister yesterday pointed to "le Blairisme" as an example to avoid.

Claude Allègre, education minister and a close friend of the Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, said the French Socialist Party was re-inventing centre-left politics. It was going through an "ideological transition" which would take the party neither towards the Communists "nor towards a conversion to Blairism".

He told *Le Figaro*: "The (French) government, and especially Lionel Jospin, are trying to invent a new way which is neither (free-market) liberalism, whose attractions are fading, nor old fashioned socialism: a way which combines individual responsibility with the general interest, justice with efficiency."

Mr Allègre's comments give a rare glimpse of the intense rivalry which exists beneath the surface friendliness between the Jospin and Blair camps. When the two prime ministers were elected this year, they inherited enormously different countries and economies. But they are in competition for the moral and philosophical leadership of the European left.

In his interview, Mr Allègre did point to some similarities between the approach of the two governments on job creation.

The interviewer from the right-wing *Figaro*, which regularly uses Mr Blair as a stick to beat the French Socialists, pointed out that the British Government was a ceaseless advocate of "flexibility" in the job market. Mr Allègre replied curtly: "They talk about flexibility, at any rate. We are not going down that road because that word has become synonymous with social precariousness and the absence of social protections for those who work."

— John Lichfield, Paris

Tsarist riddle nears its end

Some of the remains of Tsar Nicholas II and his family, murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1918, were brought to Moscow for authenticity tests yesterday.

The bones were taken to a research institute which was expected to complete tests by 15 January and to deliver a report to the government the same day. President Boris Yeltsin last month ordered the bones to be transferred from Ekaterinburg, where Nicholas II, his wife and children were shot, for final identification before reburial.

Scientists in Russia and abroad have agreed after conducting DNA tests that the re-

mains, found outside Ekaterinburg, belong to Nicholas and his family.

But the Russian Orthodox Church raised doubts about their authenticity. The decision to send the bones to Moscow for final testing has caused controversy. Officials in Ekaterinburg protested because they fear they might never be returned.

Authorities in Moscow, St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg are contesting the right to bury the remains in their cities and see this as a way to boost their standing.

Reuters — Moscow

Klaus bids to recapture power

Vaclav Klaus, ousted as Czech Prime Minister in a party funding row last week, said yesterday he would seek re-election as his party's chairman, making a general election more likely.

Klaus raised the stakes in his fight for control of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) he founded, setting up a showdown in an extraordinary party congress on 13 December.

Klaus is likely to win re-election, creating a split in the ODS and an impasse in the centre-right ruling coalition.

— Reuters, Prague

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There is no life on Mars after all, say scientists

There wasn't life in Nasa's Mars meteorite, it was a mistake caused by misinterpreting the photographs from an electron microscope. That, says Charles Arthur, Science Editor, is the latest rebuttal by a team of American scientists.

Life on Mars? No it wasn't, according to a team of American scientists, who have produced a comprehensive rebuttal to the claims by the US space agency Nasa that it had found fossil evidence of past extra-terrestrial life in a meteorite from Mars.

In fact, according to Ralph Harvey, leader of a team at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, the things that Nasa mistook for fossil bacteria in the potato-sized meteorite ALH84001 were fractures in the rock, allied to a byproduct of the technique used to photograph those fractures.

"Sometimes even nature has a perverse sense of humour," he said, adding that the worm-like threads that Nasa's multidisciplinary team described as nanofossils were formed by geological, not biological processes.

After six months of studying the meteorite, which was found in Antarctica in 1984 having split off from Mars about 4 billion years ago, Dr Harvey concluded: "We have now found two different types of mineral forms in ALH84001 that look just like nanofossils, but they are strictly non-biological." His team's findings are reported today in the science journal *Nature*.

The latest paper joins a growing list of those which have come down against the

excited announcement in August 1996 by Nasa that ALH84001 showed signs of having once harboured life. At the time, Nasa's scientists said that any confirmation of their claims would have to come from the rest of the world science community. However, that approval has been slow to arrive. In fact, no major piece of research has backed Nasa's claim, while many studies have chipped away at pieces of the series of hypotheses which are necessary to support the claim.

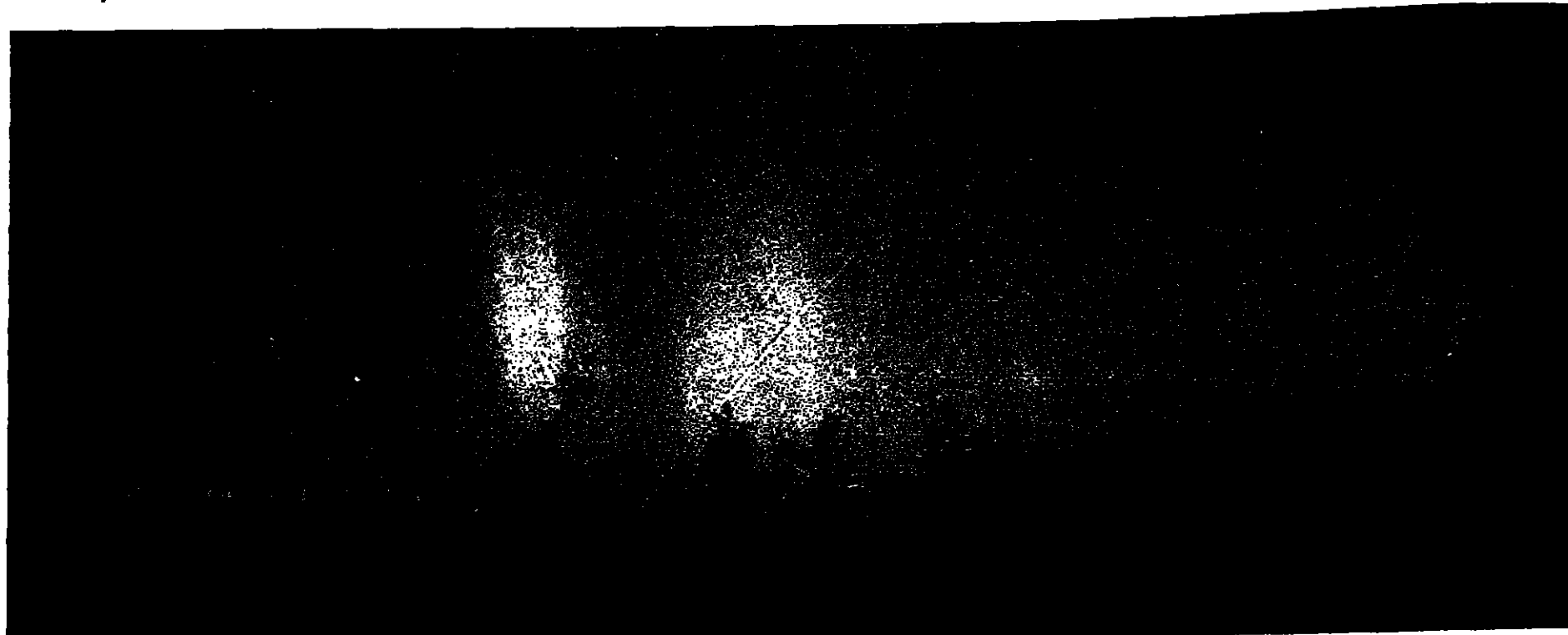
A separate reason why Nasa's claims were greeted with surprise by some scientists is that ALH84001 had been extensively studied by other scientists - including some in Britain - before passing to Nasa. Those researchers had found nothing extraordinary.

But the Nasa team examined sections of the meteorite using an electron microscope. There, they said they discovered worm-like features. They said that peculiarities of the surface features meant that they could only have been made by some sort of bacterial life, which then became fossilised. The rock in which the bacteria had lived was then sheared off Mars and eventually fell to Earth.

The CMRU team disagrees strongly. "Peculiar surface structures or segmentation on the worm-like forms are artefacts from conductive metal coatings, applied to the samples for imaging in the electron microscope."

Nasa's response will probably be that the best way to be certain will be to send missions to the Red Planet to prospect directly for life. In which case ALH84001 will have succeeded in putting life into Nasa, if not its planet of origin.

Why asteroids that killed the dinosaurs could strike again



Star-gazing: A meteor track caused by comet debris entering the atmosphere. At some stage in the future, Earth will be hit by another big asteroid. Photograph: Science Photo Library

The asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago was caused by a comparatively small meteor of the size which could be expected to hit the Earth once every hundred million years, according to British scientists.

Mike Warner, of Imperial College, London, working with a team from the US, Mexico

and Canada, has determined that the "Chicxulub impact" - near the Gulf of Mexico - was caused by an asteroid about 100km (60 miles) across. This puts it "at the low end of the estimates", said Dr Warner. "The range did go from about 80km across to 200km." The results are published today in the science journal *Nature*.

But that also means that humanity is at greater threat from such random events, since the probability of impacts falls as the size of the body increases. "In evolutionary terms, 100 million years is pretty often," he said. "Whereas something 200 km across would only hit us about once every billion years. There will

be another impact which will have dramatic consequences; and it will happen sooner than we had imagined."

Scientists are increasingly concerned that we have no co-ordinated means of detecting asteroids which could hit the Earth, and that even if we did there would be no agreed method of diverting them. A

recent survey by Nasa suggested that there are thousands of "near-Earth" objects ranging from a few hundred metres to some kilometres in size still wandering within our orbit around the Sun. Yet governments have proved reluctant to provide funding for dedicated observatories.

Dr Warner commented,

"We're used to thinking that mammals and humans appeared because they were better than what we replaced. But this event shows that the dinosaurs and the reptiles were just unlucky... If it hadn't happened, they would still be here. Evolution is a more random process than we think."

— Charles Arthur

Female hormones keep men fertile

Do men have any use for female hormones, known as oestrogens? Yes, say scientists - the tiny amount produced naturally keeps them fertile. This could also shed new light on fears over 'environmental oestrogen'. Charles Arthur investigates.

Fears that manmade chemicals which mimic female hormones are causing a loss in male fertility may be misplaced, following new research which shows that sperm actively need the female hormone, oestrogen, to thrive. Since sex hormones were discovered earlier this century, oestrogens have been regarded as an intrinsically female hormone, and androgens (such as testosterone) the essence of masculinity. Oestrogens regulate the menstrual cycle in women, and cause the changes

in female body shape at puberty. Androgens cause hair growth and the deepening of the voice in boys. Limited versions of the same change can be induced in the opposite sex by administering those hormones.

However, men and women naturally both produce small quantities of both hormones, which scientists now think are "sides of the same coin" in regulating many body functions. They now know, for example, that it is oestrogen, not testosterone, which determines when

the bones stop growing. Men who do not produce any oestrogen keep growing.

The essential role of oestrogen in male fertility was discovered by a team at the University of Illinois, which found that mice genetically engineered to have no cells which are sensitive to oestrogen are sterile.

This finding, reported today in the science journal *Nature*, has important implications for worries about "environmental hormones" such as phthalates, found in some plastics packaging, and other pollutants.

Earlier this week a survey suggested that global male fertility - measured in sperm counts - has halved over the past 50 years. This has been ascribed to increasing amounts of "oestrogen mimics" which were blamed for affecting males.

Richard Sharpe of the Medical Research Council's Reproductive Biology Unit in Edinburgh, commenting on the latest work, said that this would at last give scientists some basis for future work to see how

solidly based these claims are. "The huge, but exciting, task that we now face is to discover what oestrogens are doing at their many different sites of action in the male," Mr Sharpe said.

Rex Heff, who led the Illinois scientists, wrote in *Nature*: "This finding is important given the recent concerns over reported declines in human sperm counts and speculation that exposure to environmental oestrogens may be the cause of this."

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'Friends' in Middle East rebuff US and flock to Tehran

Arab leaders arrive in Iran this week for an Islamic conference that signals the collapse of American prestige in the Middle East. Israel's refusal to accept a Palestinian state, Robert Fisk reports from Tehran, is bringing even Washington's Arab 'friends' together in the capital of its principal adversary in the region.

Could there be a more potent symbol of American failure? In the high, chilly city of Tehran, windswept below the Elborz mountain range, the so-called "partners for peace" will be gathering alongside Washington's enemies in the Arab world. In the city which US news magazines like to call the "capital of world terror", the flags are already flying for Jordan and Egypt and the Palestinian authority – the very powers which have made peace with Israel – as well as Saudi Arabia, Syria, Kuwait, Iraq and more than a dozen other Arab nations.

Yasser Arafat will be there, of course, the man who shook hands with Yitzhak Rabin on the White House lawn four years ago. So, the Iranians believe, will Jordan's King Hussein, whose fury at Israel's attempted murder of a Hamas official in Amman has still not abated.

Amr Moussa, the Egyptian foreign minister, will be in Tehran – and efforts are being made to persuade President Hosni Mubarak himself to come. Crown Prince Abdullah has indicated he will represent Saudi Arabia.

Taha Yassin Ramadan, the Prime Minister of Iraq – the

very nation which invaded Kuwait seven years ago and threatened the Saudis – will represent Saddam Hussein.

It is, of course, an Islamic rather than an Arab conference: the Muslim nations of South-East Asia will be participating, along with Pakistan, Bosnia and Turkey. The Arab League will be represented and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has been invited.

Many of the delegates arriving in Tehran will be anxious to see if President Mohamed Khatami is truly freeing his society from the social chains of post-revolutionary Iran as his supporters claim. They will want to know what the anti-Khatami clique is trying to do by victimising Khatami's 75-year-old fellow cleric, Ayatollah Montazeri.

But the substance of the conference, which will include discussions on women's rights and education as well as the Middle East crisis, is far outweighed by its timing – at the very moment when almost every Arab nation has abandoned hope in the so-called "peace process".

How thankful the Iranians must be to the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. His latest announcement of yet further Jewish settlement on occupied Arab land is a windfall for those in Tehran who have always maintained that the process – the 1991 Madrid Arab-Israeli conference as well as the 1993 Oslo agreement – was an American trick to turn the Arabs into supplicants of Israel.

Not that the Saudis or the Kuwaitis – or for that matter the Egyptians – are subscribing to Iran's animosity towards the Arab-Israeli agreements. Mr Mubarak has been cursing his own Islamist opponents since the massacre of 58 tourists at

Luxor last month and is in no mood to embrace any form of Iran-style Islamic renaissance. Mr Arafat, whose security forces have been obediently locking up Israel's enemies in the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements – whom Iran openly supports – is not coming to Tehran to seek Iranian assistance for his grubby little statelet in Gaza (albeit Israel will probably draw that conclusion). The Saudis will go on repressing their own Shia minority however much they will be welcomed in Iran.

But that is not the point. What the Tehran summit will reflect is how dismally the United States failed to persuade its "Arab friends" to attend the Arab-Israeli economic summit in the tiny Gulf emirate of Qatar last month and how willingly those same absentees are prepared to come to the nation which the US is still attempting to isolate and – given official CIA funding to destabilise Iran – to overthrow.

It has always been Iran's belief that those Arabs who signed up for peace with Israel – and believed Washington's guarantee meant that a neutral America would ensure the fulfilment of the agreements of land for peace – would be betrayed. And now, with no help from Iran, Mr Netanyahu and the power of the Israeli lobby in the US has proved to the satisfaction of many Arab countries what Iran had all along been saying.

Fears of Iranian subversion in the Arab world, of territorial disputes with Arab gulf states and allegations that Iran is behind Islamist violence (once of Mr Mubarak's favourite claims) are now less important for the Arabs in the face of America's refusal to keep Israel to the letter as well as the spirit of its agreements.



Crowd control: The Iranian football team's cheerleader encouraging supporters

Photograph: Kamran Jebrelli

Crowds hail hand of God in World Cup triumph

Iran's football team has qualified for the World Cup finals. Robert Fisk joins the players returning from Australia to Tehran and a wild reception.

On the flight from Dubai, the crew pleaded with the passengers to sit down as they swarmed around Iran's new heroes, demanding autographs and taking snapshots of the players. No sooner had we landed than armed Revolutionary Guards, faces delirious with joy, blocked our path to the stand, along with baggage handlers and immigration officers. The Australian pilot ordered his crew not to open the doors lest the Iranians forced their way on to the plane and crushed us all.

Only when an Iranian air force helicopter taxied alongside to carry the team into town were we free to leave. In Tehran's Mehrabad airport, staff stood transfixed before television screens showing the same helicopter landing in the city football stadium before a crowd of hundreds of thousands. Not since the 1979 revolution had Tehran seen anything like this.

Iran has a habit of blaming its external enemies for its setbacks and God for its successes. True to form, divine intervention was credited by several passengers with Iran's two Melbourne goals in seven minutes which secured the country's place – just – for next year's finals in France. It was the only event in which Iran was successful, another passenger announced, which was not "trammelled up with politics or Islam".

Was it so? When Iran lost to Qatar on 14 November, the enemies of newly-elected President Mohamed Khatami – including Mohamed Nateq-Nouri, the man who lost to him – suggested that the feelings of Iranians had been "deeply hurt" and that the Khatami government should "make up for it". When Iran's team arrived home, it was a beaming President Khatami who let his people know how enthusiastically he had been following the Australian match.

As for the people, they went mad for joy. A few ladies, it was said, even joined their menfolk in dancing in the streets.

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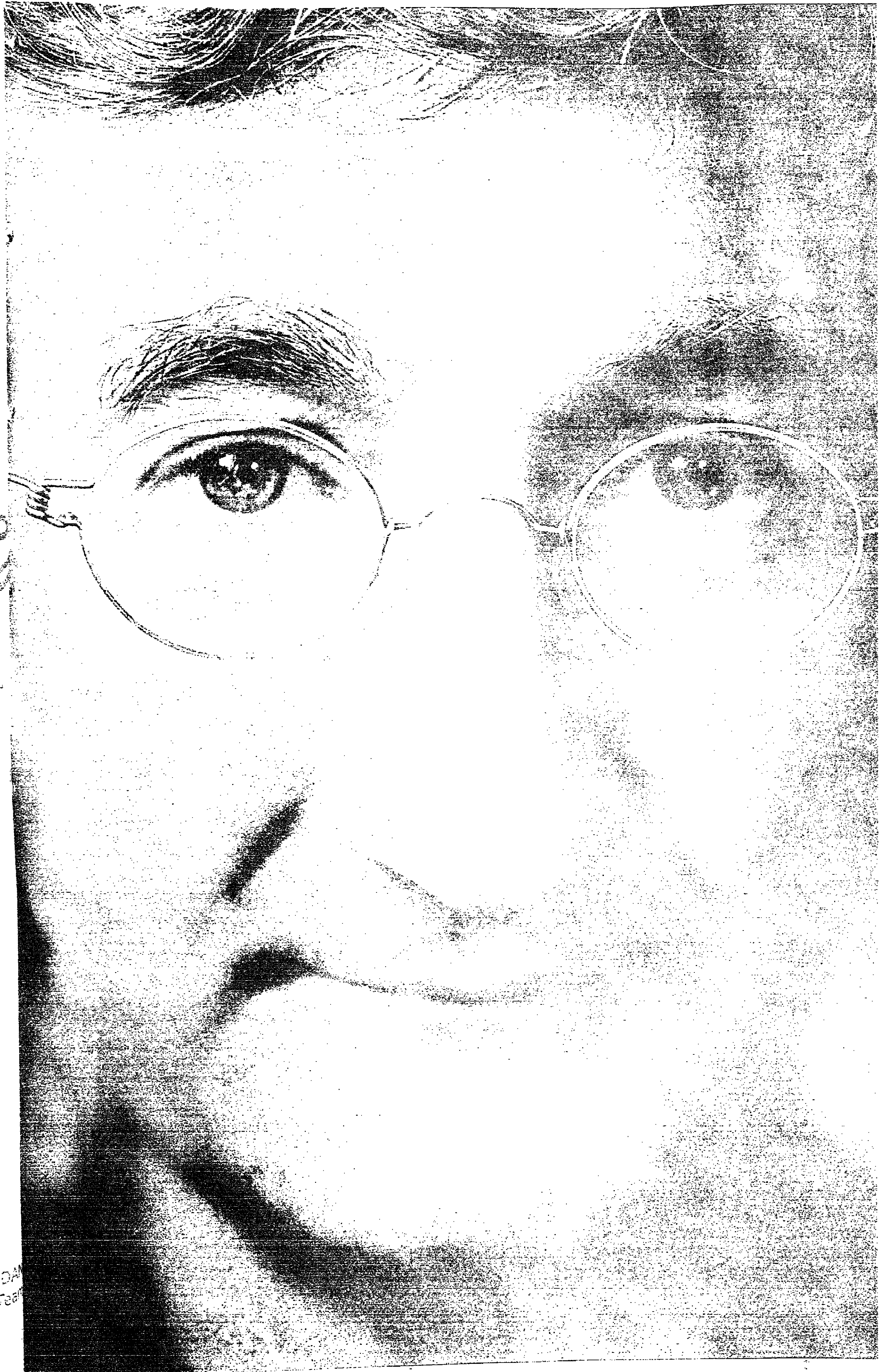
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Let's get ready to rumble! Camille Paglia, the American lesbian, intellectual and agent provocateur, hit England this week, with her gloves off. The Cambridge don Andy Martin was with her and rolled with the punches.

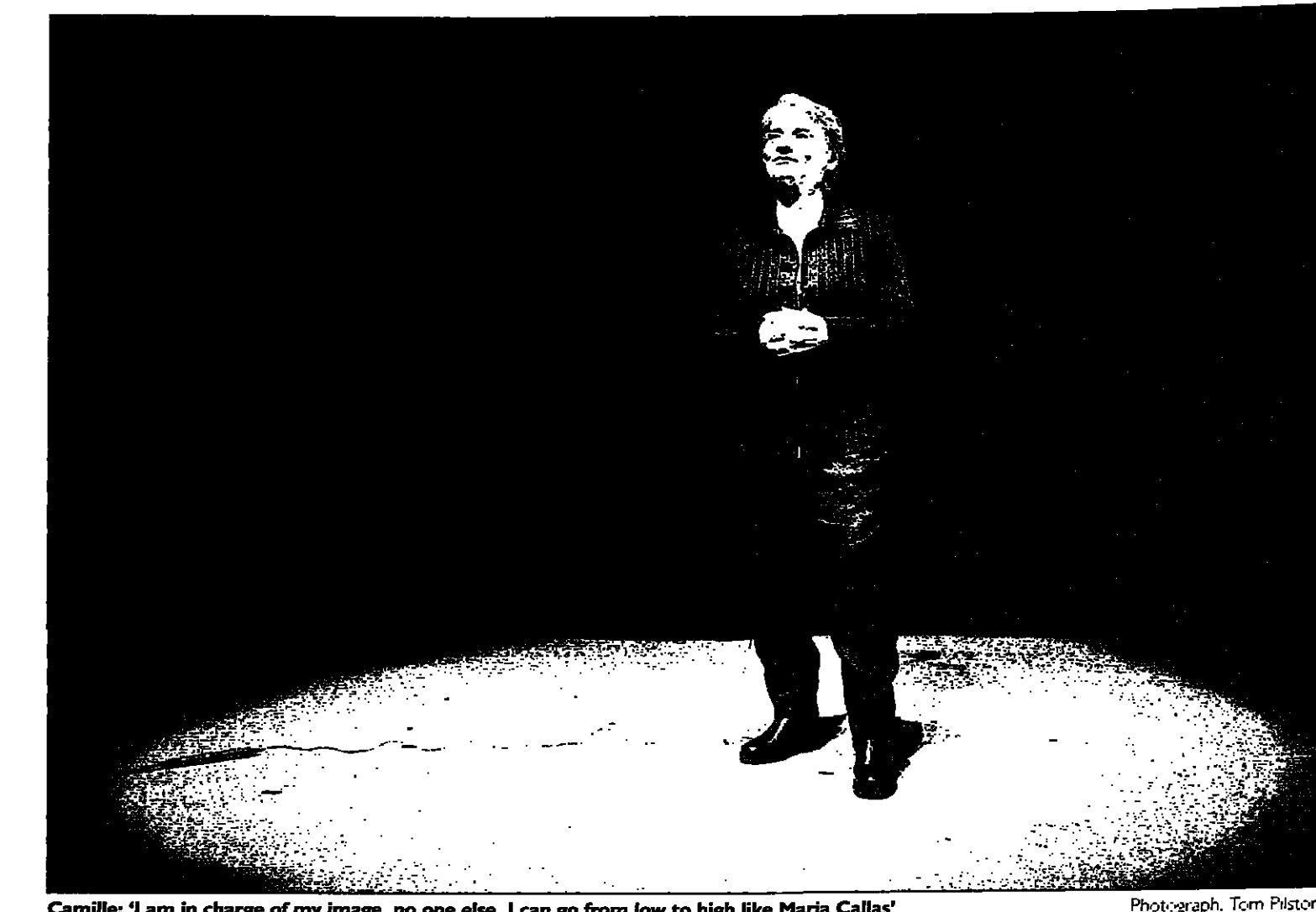
She describes herself as "an Amazonian feminist". Someone else once described her as feminism's answer to Mike Tyson. She has a reputation as a combative, pugilistic bruiser. I say this is ridiculous: I was with her off and on for two days and in all that whole time she hit hardly anyone. In fact, to my knowledge Camille Paglia only really whacked one person during the entire period of her flying visit to England. And that was me.

Monday 9am
Start the Week, Radio 4. "If a man offends," threatens Paglia, "a woman has to deal with him on the spot in word and deed." Fear and trembling: Melvyn Bragg is duly respectful. Alan Sillitoe feebly claims that novels have nothing to say about feminism; visiting American military historian refuses to engage on this field of battle: "I occupy an enclave." Weak stuff - no wonder Paglia comes back with: "Whatever happened to men? We have produced an entire generation of whinging, whining boys." Maybe Hemingway could have handled her. Or Bogart, or possibly Mailer.

10am Nicky Campbell Show, Radio 5. Paglia affirms that she is a penis-loving lesbian and offers advice on the institution of the office party: "I believe that a party should be a Dionysian orgy wherever possible. I want people to be free to make a pass." She hymns the male organ. Nicky Campbell, taking this personally, brags about his own.

11am "Gay and Lesbian London" interview. She hits out at lesbians who don't like men. "I'm only attracted to women who are attracted to men." She regrets that heterosexual pornography has been in such a rut and blames "the lack of penises". It's like hearing an atheist praise God.

12.30pm. Queen Elizabeth Hall. A Channel 4 film crew want her to do some riffs on the theme of the "new emotionalism" in England. They get more emotion than they bargained for. "I don't want to have to lose my temper," she says, losing it over a missing radio mike. "I have no time for this!" Paglia is cool and con-



Camille: 'I am in charge of my image, no one else. I can go from low to high like Maria Callas'

Photograph: Tom Pilsten

templative and non-abrasive on camera. "Can we do it again?" says the director. "This time more the way you attacked me." She erupts. "I am in charge of my image, no one else. I can go from low to high like Maria Callas, but I'm not going to do it." The producer tries to placate her, which enrages her. "That's it! I've had it - I've nothing more to say." Exit, pursued by producer.

7.30pm The Queen Elizabeth Hall. Radio 3's *Sounding the Century* lecture. "The Modern Battle of the Sexes". The Hall is packed out. 1,000 inside and more trying to get in. She puts a positive spin on history since the Enlightenment, which she sees as a story of the gradual equalisation of the rights of men and women. With only two major blips: (1) the puritanical second wave of feminism, characterised by "male-bashing"; "the more men accept what feminists tell them they want, the less women want them"; (2) post-modernism, with its equivocation over gender and just about everything else.

She argues that men are weak and women are strong. Men fear women: "An erection is a kind of achievement: if you take this achievement and put it into a black box, you're bound to wor-

ry if it's going to come out again."

Question-time. "That was the lecture of all time," says the woman next to me. Fiona, who is wearing an "I love Camille Paglia" T-shirt. "It is impossible to contradict her. Other women think it is possible. The floor mikes go to three or four women, who launch a series of personal attacks on her, barely veiled in mazy, hazy questions, complaining of patriarchy (no men dare to speak). Paglia at first tries to answer ("I demand the freedom to risk rape"), then claims to be unable to hear, then experiments with abuse ("Madam, do you have any questions or are you just going to stand there and whinge?"), and finally explodes: "This audience does not impress me. There must be some intelligent people out there. No! Goodbye." She storms off stage. Fiona is distraught: "What a lot of fits they are! Why don't they read her books?" She goes off to have her autographed by Paglia. In the foyer a woman whips off her top and bares her breasts. It is some kind of protest but nobody is sure what she's protesting about.

11pm Post-lecture dinner. Beatrice Campbell, who has hosted the

lecture, but can't take Paglia's brand of militant individualism, makes a bitter departure: "I thought your lecture was banal and conservative." Paglia blames Abigail Appleton, the BBC producer, for letting Campbell loose on her in the first place. Now they are both standing up and Paglia is shaping up to take a swing at her. I wrap my arm around Paglia's shoulder from behind in a would-be arm-lock, masquerading as a propitiatory embrace. It was a dumb move, asking for trouble. Versed in martial arts, she elbows me, throws off my grip, and starts raining blows. "Keep out of this, Andy!" But, having used me as her punchbag, she sits down at the table again. The storm has passed. I miss the last train home and a passing office party reveller throws up over me. As Paglia says in *Sexual Personae*: "the Dionysian is no picnic."

Tuesday 1.30pm. Cambridge. As soon as she arrives in Trinity, *Newsnight* is on the phone, clamouring to film her lecture tonight, no doubt anticipating more fireworks. She turns them down flat (but they continue to pursue her relentlessly throughout the day). "I'm in Cambridge now, leave the me-

dia frenzy to London. I want to concentrate on art."

5pm. Lady Mitchell Hall. Packed again. Professor Paglia moves from the Dionysian to the more apollonian mode for her lecture on "Art and Culture". With a bare minimum of notes, she improvises brilliantly on nothing less than everything, ranging over history from sphinxes to the Spice Girls, from Katherine Hepburn to *Finnegans Wake*, art and science and urination. She is sweeping and incisive, scholarly and subjective, monumental and visionary. Plus she is probably the only visiting lecturer who has studied exotic dancing at close quarters for *Penthouse* magazine and has a potent command of body language. She would have made a great stand-up comedian. She's as quick with a pun-line as she is with a punch.

6pm. Questions. Paglia has recruited me to act as "moderator", screening potentially hostile questions. But how am I supposed to know if a question is going to be hostile before it is asked? As it turns out, my only real problem is bringing it to a close. Cries go up of, "We want Camille!" There are only two real antis: one woman accuses her of

being "nostalgic" for learning. She pleads guilty. A man says she is "heartless". When one student inquires whether we need an epistemological revolution to re-evaluate the concept of knowledge and experience, she agrees but manages to bring in by way of confirmation a cooking programme with Jane Asher and advocates dumpling rolling for the young.

The audience loves her. The faculty love her for her reaffirmation of the virtues of erudition. The undergraduates love her for embracing television, rock music and the internet.

The audience only leave her alone after I reveal that she can be contacted at www.salon-magazine.com, where she is an intellectual agony aunt offering "online advice for the culturally disgruntled". Having checked her recent stuff, she must be first columnist to write a piece about Iraq that manages to fulminate more against Michel Foucault than Saddam Hussein.

10pm. Post-lecture dinner. She takes out her blood-lust on a plateful of liver this time. She has been ostracised by the academic establishment from Berkeley to Harvard. But in Cambridge she is a knock-out.

Want a date? No problem - it's all part of the job

A company that is offering free enrolment with a dating agency to lovelorn employees means well - but it could all end in tears, says Clare Garner.

If my bosses offered to pay for me to date my heart out, it would be fine by me. However, I have to say, they would be ill-advised to see it as an investment. Frankly, once I fell in love, the company could forget it. Hard work would immediately slip off the bottom of my list of priorities and hour upon hour would be wasted with me staring dreamily into the middle distance, cooing with my loved one on the telephone or sending passionate e-mails.

But presumably Pertemps Recruitment Partnership, an employment bureau that is offering free enrolment in a dating agency as part of its corporate package, is expecting some return for its services. To them the equation is simple: love interest equals happiness equals better employee.

From January, a third of Pertemps' 700 permanent employees will be given the novel corporate perk. "Our motivation is that if we can find them someone, we can make them happier," said Tim Watts, the chairman. "We have found the divorcees can become enormously miserable. If we can get them back on track we hope they will feel happier and do a better job."

The scheme is well-intentioned. Scientific evidence suggests that those in long-term relationships are happier than single or divorced people. A study by Roy Baumeister, professor of psychology at Case Western University, in Ohio, showed that those who are in happy relationships worry less about work failure and are less likely to feel unappreciated at work. They generally do not allow work to interfere with friendships or health and enjoy their holidays. Given the choice, they would choose a successful relationship over a successful career.

But, I wonder, have Pertemps really thought this one through? Going on blind dates is at best distracting and at worst depressing. Yet another lunch with yet another misfit is a pretty demoralising process and waiting for the call that never comes when Mrs Wronged finally meets Mr Right is even worse. Even assuming that the mission is accomplished and a successful match is made. Will the object of desire work harder? Hardly.

In fact, I fail to see the plus side for employers. Just think of the sickies Ms Previously Wed To Her Work will take because she is, well, just too tired from the night before. Think of the company phone bill, although, granted, it would work out cheaper than all those illicit 0898 work calls to the dating agency. And there are no prizes for guessing who will be skipping out of the door on the dot of six, regardless of whether the work is done.

And what happens three months down the line, when the relationship starts to fray at the edges and the wonderful new life that Ms PWTWH never knew she could have begins to fall apart? Surely it is only fair that Pertemps pick up the pieces at the other end by providing free counselling with Relate.

Paul Gilbert, professor of clinical psychology at Derby University, says companies should not see finding partners for employees as a cure-all. Far from the newly luvved-up feeling full of newfound confidence and energy that brings a sparkle not only to their eyes but to their work, Professor Gilbert says the early stages can be "quite a stressful time" and "quite anxiety-provoking". Furthermore, falling in love "won't be good for those who are going to say: 'Stuff work. I'm more interested in my love affair' ... Then there are the people who think it's great for the first six months and then the relationship breaks up and they're depressed and on Prozac and can't face the office."

What's good for health is not good for business. "If you're looking for high flying executives who are going to give 120 per cent, you want them to be living off adrenalin. They must be hard-edged and not too involved in intimate relationships," said Professor Gilbert. "The real high achievers are being rewarded for not paying attention to their relationships. They marry the firm."

We've been going out for five years but I can't face moving in with him

DILEMMAS



VIRGINIA IRONSIDE

Ilse's been going out with her boyfriend for five years. Now he wants her to give up her flat and live with him. One day she's sure they'll marry, so why does she feel such anxiety about living together, when as it is they're often staying at each other's homes?

Do nothing: that's a piece of advice that's rarely given but is often the best piece of advice of all. It is, after all, the piece of advice that's least easy to give because we all, not just agony aunts, want to tell people to do things to make life better for them or to help put them out of their misery.

But in Ilse's case "do nothing" is surely the best reply. What's in it for her if she gives up her flat and moves in with her boyfriend? Small wonder she's full of trepidation. She will be giving up her independence; he will be giving up none of his. She will be moving into a place with his furniture, his posters on the walls, his manky old saucers, his telephone - and although she may move some pieces of furniture of her own, and the odd picture, she will still basically be on his territory, a territory that he has metaphorically sprayed with his own smells, a territory in which his is the name on the lease, a territory for which he is ultimately responsible.

Obviously it will make life easier for them in some ways if they lived in either her place or his. None of those ghastly little bags of toothbrush, nightie, clean pants and tights, mousse, Nurofen to be lugged from place to place every other night; none of that slogging back to his or her place in the cold mornings to check the post and the messages before going to work; but maintaining the situation as it is, however inconvenient, is a small price to pay for her own independence.

How would he feel, for instance, if she suggested that he move in with her? Exactly the same thudding heart, sweat on the brow and instinctive feeling of

threat that she's feeling now, I'll be bound. "What would I do if we split up?" he'd be thinking. "Where would I go?"

I had a friend who moved in with her boyfriend under similar terms. Luckily, just before she completed the deal on the sale of her flat, he showed his true colours. He wanted everything to be the same in his house and nothing to be changed at all. His old boxing gloves still hung on a peg in the bathroom despite her entreaties that he keep them in a drawer; the photos of his old girlfriends remained pristinely on the walls in the loo, he refused the offer of a dirty clothes basket; and his old habits grew worse. Knowing that she was safely at his home when he went out he would return later and later and drunker and drunker. When they had their final showdown he uttered those words that must have always been lurking at the back of his mind: "I'll do what I like!" he shouted. "It's my flat!"

Marriage is, of course, quite a different kettle of fish to living together. If they were married they'd probably get rid of both their flats and move into a new place. They would start off as equals, dedicated to making a completely new home together, emphasis on the word "together". Even if they were to move into one of each other's homes, they'd still be on a far more equal footing.

Until the situation moves into this new dimension Ilse would be losing everything, and gaining nothing by moving in with her boyfriend. Far better, for the moment, to sit tight and retain the status quo.

WHAT READERS SAY

Explore your true feelings about this relationship

There's something intrinsically empowering about going out with someone but living separately. Living with someone only works if you can completely be yourself with them, let go and relax without fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, and without feeling that this other person is invading your personal space.

Personally I've always thought that when it's the right person, it feels right - you don't need to try. You say you're wary of living with this bloke, but you don't say why, other than this nebulous hint of not wanting to give up your own flat.

What's going to change to make you want to live with him in the future? Is it the ring you're after, the commitment and vague promise of happy ever after?

I think you should explore

your true feelings about this bloke. Perhaps you could keep your flat on for a couple of months and stay round at his to test the water. It'd be better to know now whether or not you're compatible than to create a sugary edifice of marriage and have it crumble around you.

Leyla Sanai
Glasgow

Your home is a symbol of your independence

I was in a similar position to yours a few years ago, imagining I might move in with my then boyfriend. A vivid and disturbing dream changed my mind. I was in my house, distraught, watching as removal men packed up and shifted all my belongings. I couldn't understand why I was having to leave my own home, which I loved and which was so important to me. In the dream,

it was as though the decision had been made by others and I had to go along with it. I was mightily relieved when I awoke and found that I didn't "have" to move.

Your feelings of unease about moving in with your boyfriend say it all. Trust them and stay where you are.

Juliet King-Smith
London SE7

Don't put the cart before the horse

There is that well-known quotation from *Punch* magazine: "Advice to persons about to marry - 'Don't'." Ilse should take the same advice, as it were - "Advice to young ladies who are asked to give up their independence before marriage - 'Don't'."

What more can one say? She should follow her instinct and not do it. The cart is being

put before the horse. If there is anything in their relationship it will survive.

Anon
London SW4

Living together should feel like a natural progression

First, Ilse, why do you feel that you "obviously will [marry] someday", when you have been together for five years and yet still feel alarmed at the prospect of living together? It should be a natural progression and so it appears to me that you are not ready.

Second, why is it you who has to give up your flat. Maybe this is the real crux of the problem. If you were to find a new flat to live where you were both starting off on common ground, you might see the situation in a different light.

Ms M Kieran
London NW2

NEXT WEEK'S DILEMMA

Dear Virginia, I'm a young guy in my mid-twenties and have often felt that I'm a bit different. From my early teens I've felt attracted to other men, but I also like women and this has torn me apart because one day I want to be married and have children. Maybe I'm bisexual? I recently

called a number in a Lonely Hearts column and talked for 10 minutes to a guy who wanted a loving, romantic relationship. Am I wrong to want a caring relationship with another guy for a while even if I know it won't last a lifetime and my attentions will go to the opposite sex after

a while? Should I ring this guy back so at least I've given it a try, or should I forget this whole idea and settle straight away for a heterosexual relationship?

Yours sincerely, Ben
Letters are welcome, and everyone who has a suggestion quoted will

be sent a bouquet from *latercera*. Send comments to me at the Features Department, *The Independent*, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL (fax: 0171-293 2182) by Tuesday morning. And if you have a dilemma of your own that you would like to share, please let me know.

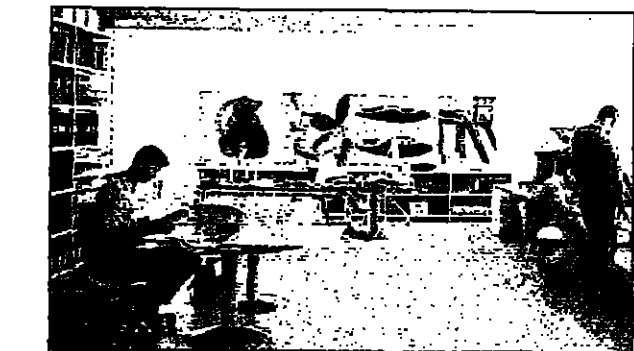
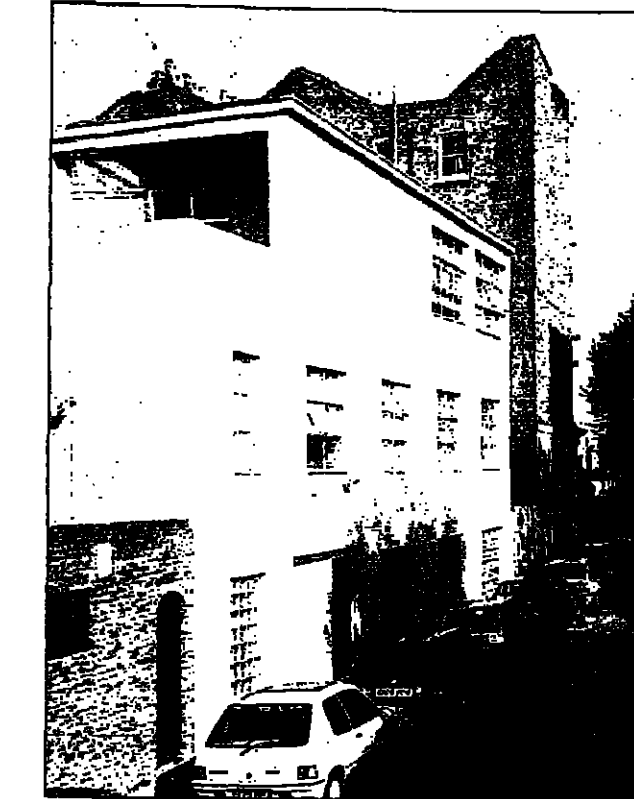
Eye-opener – now you see what they see in Seifert

In the Sixties, when his buildings rose, brutally dominating the London skyline, few had a good word for the works of Colonel Richard Seifert. Least of all architects, aesthetes and style leaders. But, says Nonie Niesewand, perhaps his style moment has come.

Colonel Richard Seifert's Sixties buildings are hardly considered London's smartest places. For decades they were a blot on the landscape. So large. So brutal. Not the world's wisest property investment. The massive ones, like Centre Point at the bottom of New Oxford Street, became national scandals.

At first sight, a Seifert's late-Fifties leather tannery warehouse in Notting Hill gate is not an inspiring place. But behind a two-storey chunky industrial brick face, it hides its huge open spaces of 1,200 sq ft. The Polish architect Miska Miller and her husband, the designer Ross Lovegrove, have made it their office and their home. Miller admits: "I'm not a big lover of this period, the Sixties in London. I mean, it was a distortion of wonderful modernist ideas that frequently lost the proportions." But she likes the way that the factory was planned to go horizontally, not vertically like so many London houses.

Its stolid concrete and steel structure meant they couldn't do much about changing the internal layout. Just putting in a staircase took a lot of nerve and a week of power drilling. Because their practice is on the ground floor, and they sleep and bathe above, they added an open-plan third floor, which mirrors exactly Seifert's proportions. "Warehouses by Seifert are respected over here these days. They are good projects to build upon because they are so honest. But this doesn't have the



Behind the stark Seifert façade, the designer Ross Lovegrove and the architect Miska Miller have made a beautifully enjoyable place where they work and live
Photographs: Jeremy Cockayne/ Arcad

clarity of construction and feeling of lightness or the wonderful use of materials that I really like."

The biggest change they made was to cover the outer brickface in a sandy natural-coloured render to lighten it up. They added glass blocks at the ground floor to help the natural light, and bigger windows that follow the same grid as Seifert's on the next floor. Rooflights let in more light to the top floor.

Other people are starting to see the virtues of Seifert's buildings and enjoy them. For a

start, there's that big open horizontal grid he built on. Seifert, in his 87th year, is around to hear the good news. He still goes into work almost every day.

Perhaps the first person to spot the Seifert virtues was the Frenchman Patrick Dermoy. A decade ago he opened his furniture and interior design shop Atrium, in a Seifert shell below Centrepoint – "in a wind tunnel but you learn to live with it".

He really wanted to live there. "I first saw it in 1985, all boarded up, just a big, empty box. There was absolutely nothing in it, not even the mezzanine, let alone a phone-line. 17 years after Seifert had designed it, I asked my solicitors to get in touch with the landlord, who was Harry Hyams, but he wouldn't rent it to me. Eventually I wore him down. As a modernist I did not want to go into premises which had been refurbished.

"When we moved into Centrepoint it was more than half empty. Now the whole place is full of financial corporations. But that marvellous horizontal plane. There was never any doubt in my mind that we could keep to the spirit of the building and add to it."

Once upon a time one would never have expected to hear an architectural expert talk enthusiastically about Centrepoint. "It's like a Bridget Riley building that rises a mile high," says Dr Neil Bingham, assistant curator at the RIBA Heinz Gallery. Does this sound like the much reviled Centrepoint building to you?

He is enthusiastic as he catalogues a collection of perspectives of Richard Seifert's

buildings from the Fifties. Sixties and Seventies. "These drawings are perfect time pieces of Colonel Seifert's pop buildings," he says. Perspectives from Seifert's practice drawn by his watercolourist, a certain Mr Gill, include prelims of Centrepoint, the round Civil Aviation building at Aldwych, the Times Building, and a huge model of the Nat West tower from 1971.

RIBA Heinz Gallery is at 21 Portman Square, London W1 (0171-307 3605)

World Cup: the balls are leather, the stadium plastic

The new stadium in Paris where the World Cup Final will be played next summer is mostly PVC. Why didn't the environmentalists get stuck in, asks Nonie Niesewand

There's no doubt that the venue for the World Cup Final next summer, a new 80,000-seat stadium, north of Paris at Saint Denis, is a triumph of engineering and a beautiful thing. It is also built almost entirely of PVC. It's enough to make any Green see red.

Greenpeace have targeted PVC on high-profile, quick turn-around projects such as the Sydney Olympic stadium and the Millennium Dome, both to be completed in 2000, and they have been successful. Sydney has replaced all PVC piping with clay. At Greenwich, even though the British government doesn't want to admit that Greenpeace's "Toxic Monster" claim influenced them, they pulled the contract for PVC from the German company, Koch Hitec and gave it to the American BirdAir, to supply coated glass fibre. Environmentalists object to the way PVC is made and the difficulty of disposing of it.

The reason given for changing the composition of the Millennium Dome was that it would have a longer shelf-life. Everyone cheered up at that. Maybe the dome would become a sports arena after all the celebrations.

But the PVC manufacturers resent that argument about longevity even more than the one about pollution. So when Le Stade was completed, all the rival manufacturers banded together to form the European Council of Vinyl Manufacturers and show off the stadium as the jewel in their plastic crown. Does it have a sell-by date? Architect spokesman

René Provost was disappointingly vague: "I don't know exactly the life of the product." It's reckoned to be about 25 years. And a bitumen roof would have to be replaced in 10 years' time. So unless the French have scored an own goal they will have the most photographed stadium in the world. It is the basis for their bid for the 2006 Olympics.

Why didn't Paris feel the heat? Above the spectators in Le Stade float 14,000 tons of PVC. The roof is weighted with concrete sandwiched between the membranes, so it doesn't have lift off in a high wind. Below the pitch and running under the tiers of seats are 50,000 square meters of PVC sealing off the toxic wastes deep underground from its legacy as a gas site (Greenwich is twinned with Saint Denis in this respect). The kings of France buried just down the road in Saint Denis must be turning in their graves. When the grass on the pitch still turned yellow the authorities said it was the sand mix and zealous mowing. The irony is that to clean it up, a PVC membrane is laid over it. Then fumes are piped off and burnt on site.

"All materials are scrutinised by environmental groups these days. But the choice of PVC wasn't an issue, any more than asbestos ceilings," Provost reports. In just 30 months the stadium was built.

Provost is typically Gallic in his priorities. The appearance of PVC, "white and light, luminous", influenced their decision. As well as more mundane considerations: plasticity, lightweight, sealing abilities, implementation and supply.



That diaphanous quality is what makes such a gigantic building hover so agreeably above ground. Colour number 7035 is now named Le Stade and looks more like aeroplane wings than the black bag liners that PVC somehow conjures up.

THE INDEPENDENT INDEPENDENT BLUEBIRD

Reader Evening at the Bluebird

INDEPENDENT / BLUEBIRD EVENING: TUESDAY 16TH DECEMBER

Join Terence Conran, The Independent and the Independent on Sunday as we celebrate Christmas at the Bluebird on Tuesday 16th December from 6pm to 9pm.

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20/LEADER & LETTERS

The Royal Opera is too important to leave to these amateurs



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The overwhelming majority of the population cares not a tuppenny bit for opera and ballet, and therefore imagines the Covent Garden saga to be a distracting sideshow, of interest only to the effete and élite. They are wrong for two reasons. It matters, even to those who can't tell their *Siegfried* from their *Sieglinde*, because their money pays most of the bills. It also matters because the story shows how, for all the talk of Thatcher's handbags knocking the Establishment off its perch, important sectors of British life are still being run by back-scratching, self-regarding and more or less amateurish cliques. The management of opera matters because the arts matter, and this whole story bears all the symptoms of what has historically been wrong with arts management in Britain. Moreover, it matters because quality culture attracts visitors, esteem, creates jobs, and reflects and deepens the nation's sensibilities.

That makes yesterday's report from the House of Commons Culture Select Committee required reading. The committee's

chairman, Gerald Kaufman, is an ex-journalist, whose instinct is to despise the usual politician's and committee clerk's instinct to couch their criticisms in ambiguous abstractions. This report is written with panache and larded with trenchant phrases. It also shows, not for the first time, that Mr Kaufman rides his hobby horses hard and warps his judgements to accommodate his personal prejudices. His criticisms none the less are on target.

For the past few years the Royal Opera House has been run by gents pretending to be players, notably Sir Jeremy Isaacs. Having once produced great television films, Sir Jeremy was translated into management positions requiring skills he did not possess and - this seems to be a peculiarly British establishment failing - no one blew the whistle. What exactly is the role of the "lay" board which in theory supervises paid management, and who cries quid custodiet when the Great and the Good on it turn out to be incapable of doing the job? Here is a question which

can and should be put to a host of public and voluntary sector bodies.

At the Opera, board and management took a sequence of decisions leading up to the closure for redevelopment which were wilfully obtuse. The Kaufman committee spends a lot of energy reviling Mary Allen, the recently-appointed chief executive. But for all the questions surrounding her appointment, the woman only arrived in September and neither she, nor the chairman, Lord Chadlington, who is only a year in post, can be held responsible for the financial deficits they inherited, nor the failure to find the opera and ballet companies satisfactory billets during the evacuation from Covent Garden.

But the Royal Opera House does not exist in a vacuum. It gets an annual grant from the Arts Council which is supposed, in its turn, to be supervised by the Department of Culture, Department of National Heritage, or the Office of Arts and Libraries, to name the three most recent Whitehall departments with the arts

remit. Mr Kaufman says it is not worth criticising Lord Gwry, the Arts Council chairman, since he is going anyway. But will the system of monitoring be any better under his successor? Is there a valid case any longer for the administration of public money for the arts to be at arm's length? When the Council started, in the 1940s, it seemed vital to prevent the state deciding how much should be spent on poetry rather than orchestral music. But now, when the politics of culture (and cultural politics) are so much closer to the mainstream of national life, would it really be so oppressive to have Mr Chris Smith and his officials cutting the cake - and, most importantly, carrying the can? The present arrangement allows everyone to blame everyone else (in the politest possible way, of course).

Faced with the debacle in the Garden, Mr Smith has already acted in interventionist spirit, by commissioning Sir Richard Eyre to report to him on the future of nationally-funded opera in the capital. In the

light of the Kaufman report he needs to use his financial leverage to demand assurances. An honourable man in Lord Chadlington's position would not need to be pushed, he would go - British public life has had enough of Conservative public relations men for the time being. He may not have caused the chaos, but he has been lackadaisical in restoring order. Ms Allen has not had time to prove her mettle: let her continue, provided she can demonstrate that a tight financial regime is now in place. As for Covent Garden's board, a careful clear-out is recommended, retaining supporters of real value such as Vivien Duffield, and stern chaps, such as Bob Gavron, but otherwise starting with folk of more determined mien.

The Royal Opera must hold down the hatches this winter season, and then, starting next year, separate the opera and ballet companies for good, reanimate the repertoire and ensure that the vitality of opera as a living art form starts to manifest itself once more in Floral Street.

LETTERS

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

BSE inquiry

Sir: A public inquiry into the BSE disaster is on the verge of being announced. As the parents of Stephen Churchill, the first and, as yet, youngest death from human BSE (new variant CJD) we take this opportunity to remind those making the decisions that the inquiry must be held by a judge, as it is imperative that it should have the right to subpoena both people and documents, and the judge must have the authority to inquire into any matter that he sees fit, in order to seek the truth about what has happened.

Whilst we are but one family we speak on behalf of all the families touched by this tragedy. Today we grieve for 23 deaths but others are being nursed as we write. To have the right quality of inquiry is essential otherwise we the families, the nation and Europe will only see a lower level of inquiry as being yet another cover-up, perpetuating what went before under the Conservative government.

We as families seek only the truth. We do not wish for a scapegoat from today's administration but for the real guilty parties to be brought to book. In addition we must all learn from the mistakes made so that a tragedy of this magnitude never happens again.
DAVID CHURCHILL
DOROTHY CHURCHILL
Devizes, Wiltshire

Royal Opera House

Sir: Tonight (3 December) the Royal Ballet represents the United Kingdom at the festivities marking the reopening of the Teatro Real in Madrid. From Friday the Royal Opera contributes to the Year of Opera and Music Theatre in East Anglia with performances of Britten's *Paul Bunyan*. Both events represent the essence, quality and range of the Royal Opera House and its performing companies.

That Mary Allen, our chief executive since September, should be so vilified in today's select committee report scorns the efforts and achievements of the entire organisation during this difficult period of transition. Under Ms Allen's leadership, we are facing up to our problems, restructuring management and financial systems, and developing economically viable artistic plan that will en-

able us to return to Covent Garden with a programme that does justice to our redevelped theatre.

That our development continues on time and on budget, while our fundraising has been more successful than any other comparable capital campaign, demonstrates the commitment of very many people to achieving our goals. We will do this best through our own endeavours, by strong management and leadership. We could have no better champion of our cause than Ms Allen, who has our unreserved support.

Sir ANTHONY DOWELL
Director of the Royal Ballet
KEITH COOPER
Director of Sales and Marketing
RICHARD HALL
Director of Finance
JOHN HARRISON
Technical Director
MIKE MORRIS
Director of Personnel
NICHOLAS PAYNE

Director of the Royal Opera
PHYLLIDA RITTER
Director of the Friends of Covent Garden
ANTHONY RUSSELL-ROBERTS
Administrative Director of the Royal Ballet
JOHN SEEKINGS
Development Director
MALCOLM WARNE
HOLLAND
Orchestra Director
Royal Opera House
London WC2

University fees

Sir: While you rightly remind your readers of the reasons why we have had to reform university funding and the fairness which is built into our proposals, you suggest that we have failed to inform potential students properly (leader, 3 December). This is not the case. I have been ready to discuss them and write about them at every opportunity. While there was some controversy in August

over gap year students - which we speedily resolved in their favour - it is absurd to suggest that we have been failing to put forward both the arguments and the nature of the new scheme.

We have already issued over half a million leaflets to sixth forms and further education colleges. We have established a free helpline - 0800 731 9133 - and a website - info@dfce.gov.uk. We have provided schools and colleges with posters highlighting the helpline number and we have taken out prominent newspaper and radio advertisements.

Of course there are difficulties in tackling misinformation when a new system is introduced, and given the previous government's unwillingness to tackle the university funding crisis there were bound to be. But students and universities are already seeing the benefits of change, with an extra £165m for next year to improve standards and access.

This will allow us to double access funds, helping part-timers in particular, to exempt postgraduate teaching students from course fees and to provide an extra £250 hardship loan to those who need it.
DAVID BLUNKETT
Secretary of State for Education and Employment
House of Commons
London SW1

Sir: Thank you for your praise in your leader on student tuition fees. But contrary to your implication, it is not the intention of the National Union of Students to frighten would-be students away from higher education to make a point in our campaign: the evidence is clear that the prospect of paying university tuition fees is killing ambition among potential students.

Parents will not be relieved of their contribution towards their offspring's living costs. Access to part of the maintenance loan will be

means-tested, so better off families will be denied the cheaper state loans.

The tuition fee is the real deterrent. This must be paid up front by those parents assessed to pay all or part of it, and contrary to the repeated assertions by backbench Labour MPs in the media, there will not be a loan for the tuition fee. The Government have made this clear to us and clear to sixth formers and other would-be students in their leaflets, letters and other promotional materials, but the message has not been given to their own representatives, prolonging the confusion over the terrible plan for tuition fees.

It is time for the Government to go back to the drawing board. There is no point inventing a new system of university funding unless you can persuade people to study.
DOUGLAS TRAINER
National President
National Union of Students
London N7

Minimum wage

Sir: Ian McCartney, Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry, is not exactly correct when he states (Letters, 1 December) that "all sectors of business also support the principle of a minimum wage".

The bulk of Britain's businesses are either micro (less than 10 employees) or small (less than 50) and some 97 per cent employ fewer than 20. While these may support a reasonable wage negotiated at local level, many worry that if a statutory, national, minimum wage is set too high then many will have to shed staff.

The much-vaunted US minimum wage applies only to industry and is set so low that employers pay it anyway. Despite promises to help small businesses, we are still to be made criminals, fined and penalised.
BERNARD JUBY
Chairman
Trade and Industry Policy Unit
Federation of Small Businesses
London SW1

Green Japan

Sir: You describe Japan as "a wasteful country, with a poor record on recycling" ("Japan fears a bumpy ride on road to climate deal", 1 December). All evidence here points to the contrary.

At railway stations there are separate rubbish bins for newspapers, cans and bottles. Similarly at offices and in the Japanese home, rubbish must be separated into categories, otherwise it will not be taken away. It is common here for neighbours to search through offending rubbish in order to find an envelope with the address of the depositor, in order to return it.

There are recycling facilities at supermarkets for items such as milk cartons (which must first be washed and cut and laid flat. I'm not kidding.) There are also special rubbish collection days for items such as batteries and polystyrene.
PETER JUETT
Saitama, Japan

Sir: Nicholas Schoon is right to ask what difference it will make to have information on air pollution made more widely available ("Appliance of science to smog alerts", 20 November). The answer, of course, is that those who suffer ill-health because of traffic fumes, up to 15 million in the UK, will now know when to stay as prisoners in their own homes.

Michael Meacher may take pride in a reporting system that leads the world, but the desperate need now is not for information on how poisonous the air is, but for clean air itself. The Government must commit itself to reducing pollution by tackling the causes of pollution, in particular traffic.
ANDY SPRING
Enfield, Middlesex

After the hunt

Sir: I think it is absolutely right and proper that an MP should put a Bill through Parliament outlawing the premeditated, conscious and appalling abuse of helpless animals perpetrated for the selfishness of an unenlightened section of the population. I look forward to the introduction of the Cruelty to Animals (Battery Farming) Act.
ALAN BURLS
London SW11

For those who still haven't done their Christmas shopping, a few life-savers ...



MILES KINGSTON

As Christmas creeps ever closer, bringing with it the age-old message that if only you keep your nerve it will very soon be Boxing Day, it's time for another round of help with your Christmas gift problems. Yes, let us go bravely once more into the Independent Christmas Bazaar and see what new things are on the market this year, for the person who can't think of anything to get for the people who seem to have everything! Australian Father Christmas outfit
As anyone who has ever dressed up as Father Christmas will testify, the costume can be death to wear - heavy, hot, scratchy and smelly. Not

Xmas set of clothes from Down Under! Down there they know all about slim-line, drip-dry, non-crease summer wear, and you'll revel in the slinky freedom of your mid-summer beachwear-style Santa Claus outfit! Ideal for summer fancy dress parties too! Comes in three styles: outdoor, barbecue, and Bondi Beach. Cords are extra. Only £99.99.
Unique Magazine Subscription
A magazine subscription is always a good idea, but it's hard to think of the right magazine to send someone. All the best magazines seem to have gone out of business years ago, don't they? And that's where we come in, be-

cause we have collected complete runs of many of the best magazines of the past, and can now arrange for a 12-month subscription to such classics as *Lilliput*, *Illustrated London News*, *Men Only* and pre-war *Punch*. From £1,500.99 a year.
Crossword Pyjamas
Why did nobody ever think of this before? The perfect gift for the insomniac! Yes, each pair of pyjamas has a large-format crossword printed on it, so that if you wake up at night and can't drop off again, you can pit your wits against your own night wear, and tackle the clues up and down your body! And for the saucer-siesta, you and your partner can both wear a pair, and

explore each other's contours in a thoroughly physical yet intellectual way! Comes in three crossword shades: Concise, Moderate and Difficult. Thoroughly washable. Solutions on back. £39.99.
Christmas First Aid Hamper
It's one of the perennial delights of Christmas time, the traditional hamper with its puddings and pies, its mince-meat and maroon glacés, its chocolates and cheeses! Unfortunately, this always brings jills in its train, from indigestion to heartburn, from dyspepsia to dysentery. And that's why we've assembled this special Xmas hamper stuffed, not with food, but with all the medical aids you're likely to need. Parac-

etamol, fizzy white powder, laxatives, and powerful purges, yes, but bandages, splints and tongue-scrappers too! A Phestive Pharmacy Phountain! Free nurse's hat comes with it. The ideal gift for the hypochondriac in your family. £59.99.
Bonza! Family Tree Kit
Many people who set out to explore their own family tree give up the chase when the task seems too great, the ramifications too vast. Now, with this miniature Japanese-style family tree, you need only explore two generations, or less. Ideal for adopted people, those with revolving relations, etc etc. £39.99.
Vintage Television Evening
Was television really better

back in the old days? No, of course it wasn't - it was rubbish, just like it is now - but for the person who keeps going on about how good it used to be, this video of an entire evening's viewing from 1959 will be the corrective needed. Includes dreary interview with Harold Macmillan, highlights of nil-nil draw between Nottingham and Sheffield Wednesday, cookery programme on dumplings, documentary called *Will There Ever be a Channel Tunnel?*, etc, etc. Fascinating? No, but he'll never admit it! £69.99.
Boxed set of three.
The Xmas Files
Yes, the first book to combine the allure of the paranormal with the mystery of Christmas.

In this new adventure, our X File sleuth pays a time visit to AD0. Why have they gone to AD0? Because something very strange is happening. A little baby has been born, apparently with no father. Voices appear in the sky, proclaiming his coming kingdom. Many babies are slain. Three wise men appear, then vanish. And is that a star? Or something more sinister? Gradually the Files sleuths uncover a plot emanating from somewhere else, codename Heaven, to make us all better people. Should they blow it sky high? Or turn a blind eye? This season's best-seller! Full price £29.99, then mysteriously remaindered in the week after Christmas at £2.99.

The figure in black that is stalking Whitehall



DAVID
AARONOVITCH
LABOUR'S RADICAL
AGENDA

It pleases the social stratum of which I am a member (well-paid professionals, journalists, lawyers, professors and allied trades) to believe that this is a hollow government. Others (like the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*) may be fooled by Tony's plausibility and the alchemy of his spinners, but not us. We are sophisticated who watch *Newsnight*, listen to *Today* and whose trained eyes see the wires that hoist that sparkling Blairism, invisibly, to the top of the proscenium. It is all, we tell each other at parties, a pretty concoction of focus groups and popular instinct, projected through smoke and mirrors. There is nothing authentic there. Yesterday, my colleague Boris Johnson (who, along with the crime reporting, the tales of village life and the unintentionally hilarious editorials, is one of the best things about the *Daily Telegraph*) used the Minister without Portfolio's appearance in front of the Culture Select Committee, as a launching pad for an extended metaphor involving the Dome and the Government itself. He concluded that "This dome is not intended to be a monument to posterity... like so much Labour politics, [it] is all about mood."

This perception is clearly shared on the left. Journalists express amazement that vast sums of money are not being found for all their pet concerns, from public transport to single mums. Radicalism for them means a simple return to the ancient verity of throwing dross at the poor via benefit and social services. In hope, they followed Labour through a two-year election campaign without really believing a word of what they were told. And when the size of the majority was announced, they proclaimed a sea-change, sat back and waited for the tax and benefit increases. Now they think that there is nothing there, save for Brown's frown and Blair's smile.

But my advice is to look more carefully through the smoke, to where a vision has appeared, and is gradually taking on substance. It has a tall hat, this figure; it favours black clothes, wears buckled shoes and carries a well-thumbed copy of the Bible. Far from having no fixed view on life in Britain, it has some very coherent thoughts on the subject which - bit by bit - it will share with us, as and when we are mature enough to understand.

This is the apparition that determined that the cut to single parents' benefits must stay. For all Harriet Harman's protestations about "hard choices" and the oft-repeated litany about staying inside the previous government's spending figures, the money could easily have been found to pay it. Look at the way pensioners the country over will be sitting in front of their electric fires this winter, mumbling "Gor bless yer, Mr Brah" to the generous chancellor who gave them that fifty extra pounds.

But the single parents didn't get their money. Why? Because the Government did not want to increase the benefit to them of staying out of work. They could have the expensive child care and lots of it, oh yes. But not for sitting on their fannies, bringing up kids to whom the world of work was alien, and who become useless adults believing that the state really does owe them a living. Like Mrs Thatcher, the Government - for all its crinkly smiles - is not happy with us as we are. It does not think that we are a great bunch of people who simply need a bit more spent on us all. Tony and Gordon and Jack, believe that - frankly - many of us need a bit of a hand from them to help us have better: as citizens, pupils, parents, consumers and workers. Then we will be able to build the Great Society.

But, as Polly Toynbee's recent article on the great Wisconsin welfare reform made clear, this remoralisation does not come cheap. It costs a lot to get people standing on their own two feet. There must be priorities. So, this week we have had Chancellor Brown getting in among the Tassas and the Peps. The biggest savers (who are also, naturally, the richer among us) will lose out on some tax relief. But those who are less wealthy will be helped - cajoled into good, thrifty habits. Virtue among the humble must be rewarded. And the humble must be protected too. Yesterday, just a day later, Jack Straw published his Crime and Disorder Bill, aimed specifically at dealing with the young offender and the disturber of society's peace. David Blunkett's big education bill, to force up standards in the main run of state schools, will follow later this week.

And, like the most ruthless radicals, the Government has indicated that it will not be waylaid by sentimental impediments. It knows that no administration is going to abolish private schools, however much its members may dislike them. That being so, how much more sensible it is to draw them into a relationship with the state sector - and guilt trip them into the Giving Society, where they can jolly well help the humble. And if they don't give? Then they will have forfeited some of their political support, and may well lose their charitable status. If you accept all this, then you can see that this government may indeed be a radical one. But, as with the Thatcherite seizure of power of 1979 and after, the full implications of this radicalism may only become clear as the years pass. On May 1 we parted; now the first bills are just beginning to come in.

Nothing's so gripping as a good divorce, but we must hold back



POLLY
TOYNBEE
ON PRIVACY
LEGISLATION

Now that was a good divorce. How we all enjoyed it, all the pure pleasure of gossip. No point pretending it wasn't fun. It was.

Charles Spencer was a marked man from the day he attacked the press with such venom in front of all the world. Even as they printed sentimental pictures of him alone (except for photographers), palely loitering among the flowers on Diana's grave, we knew it wouldn't be long before they got him, whatever it took.

But who could have guessed that the man would deliver himself up, free, gratis and for nothing? Papers usually spend thousands of pounds on such stories - in round-the-clock surveillance, bribes and cheque-book confessions. But not this time. He chose to walk into that courtroom and take off all his clothes in public, trading his public reputation for what he hoped would be paying out less money. And how the Windsors must have revelled in his humiliation, after what they'd had to take from him in stony silence at the funeral.

So the natural pleasure most of us take in a cracking good story was not, for once, tinged with the usual guilt about the way the story was obtained. He could, as his wife wished, have had the case heard in Britain where divorce proceedings are private. But no, he ticked the box marked Publicity. Of course Victoria Spencer didn't. Nor did their four children: there were innocent victims, as there always are.

The grisly details of this divorce is a reminder that even in lurid cases, there's rarely a simple right or wrong in people's private lives. Indeed as time goes by, people themselves keep reassessing "the truth" of their own life stories, rewriting emotional history to suit their changing moods, becoming more forgiv-



Press intrusion can be controlled; but the House of Commons must take the lead

Photograph: Fobal Collection

ing or more angry, more self-aware or less. Complete truths don't emerge in courtroom battles nor in newspapers which is why the private can never be fairly reported in public.

Titillating stories about the private lives, loves and griefs of others are the stuff of journalism. Sometimes it is inevitable - Paula Yates and Michael Hutchence - where people who live by the limelight cannot avoid dying and grieving in it too. Often though, the intrusion is utterly unwarranted, glossed over with family values unctious to justify aggressive invasion of privacy. Of course we love reading this stuff, even if we disapprove at the same time. Ambiguity is human. The public says they hate it. MORF find 73 per cent of people think the press intrudes too much into the private lives of public figures. And yet they buy the papers that do so most flamboyantly. Nothing odd about that - the law is there to stop us doing things we might do (even if we disapprove of them) were there no law to protect us against our worse selves.

Now the Government is about to introduce a back-door privacy law, cack-handed, the wrong thing for the wrong reasons. For once, it unites those (few) of us in the press who favour privacy legislation, with the great majority who passionately oppose it. The *Daily*

Mail's leader denounced this act that would "gag the press under this privacy law that dare not speak its name" - true. The *Sun* called it "a threat to the free press" - which it is. For the Lord Chancellor has just admitted that, despite earlier denials, incorporating the European Convention of Human Rights will introduce a privacy law of the worst possible kind.

The story so far: in whatever pact, spoken or unspoken, Labour made with the devil before the election, it was made clear that no finger would be laid on the media. So Labour's new competition law will not tackle the Murdoch empire, although it is the most pernicious example of anti-competitive practice in Britain. Nor will the new Government subject him to the monopoly laws he was allowed to escape under the Tories, nor force him to divest himself of any of his overweening media ownership. Nor was Labour going to legislate on privacy - cowed by the mass opposition of all the press (bar this paper and the *Guardian*).

But Labour always said it would incorporate the Human Rights Convention. That convention has two warring clauses: Article 8 guarantees privacy for the citizen against intrusion by the state and its quangos, while Article 10 guarantees freedom of expression. At first

government advice was that the privacy article wouldn't touch the press: it concerned privacy from the state, not from a privately owned newspaper. Now, however, the Lord Chancellor has been embarrassed by a legal opinion that says that the voluntary press self-regulator, the Press Complaints Commission, could be regarded as a public body in law. That means a complainant could take the PCC to court for failing to give protection against some act of media intrusion. What's more, a privacy complainant could get an injunction to prevent publication.

This means Justice Cockle-corn will interpret privacy case by case, creating law in the worst possible way, according to their lordships' taste. The wording is so hazy, there's no way of knowing how it will go. But if a Robert Maxwell, who so adeptly used the libel laws, wanted to prevent intrusion on the privacy of his bank accounts he could seek an injunction, and if his invaded privacy were published, he could sue the PCC. There will be no "public interest" exemptions, and no distinction between prurient videos of MPs romping in their bedrooms and legitimate investigation of the whereabouts of employees' pilfered pension funds.

What's to be done? Human Rights legislation will be incorporated, so what we need now

is our own carefully thought-out privacy law. Opponents always say you can't separate legitimate investigative journalism from nosy prying. But you can. People's (legal) sex lives can be made private by prohibiting papers from publishing anything about them. On the other hand, suspected illegal activity could be investigated unrestrained. There'd be no need for arcane definitions of what is and isn't a private or a public space (currently the muddled PCC code implies that a beach in Brighton in summer may be public, but a Norfolk beach in winter might be deemed private). All that matters is what you can print. That would mean true confessions volunteered by an ex-lover would be just as out of bounds as a snooping camera over the garden wall. A strong public interest clause would only allow exposure of extreme sexual hypocrisy, not just of any old vicar or Tory MP, but only of some telly evangelist, a Dame Jill Knight or a Mary Whitehouse who made their living out of trumpeting family values.

It's time for the press and the Government to bite the bullet. Better far a privacy law argued out in detail in the House of Commons than a haphazard and dangerously catch-all privacy law botched together by the whim of judges.

Of course the Turner Prize should really have gone to the chat show

JOHN
WALSH



I've long been a fan of "installation pieces", those frightfully clever descendants of the *tubex vivants* that amused provincial art lovers in the Thirties. And knowing that Ms Gillian Wearing was on the shortlist for the Turner Prize, I switched on Channel Four on Tuesday night with lively interest. Ms Wearing, let me remind those in the slow lane of art appreciation, is an installationist of striking inventiveness. One of her recent pieces, *60 Minute Silence*, is a gripping, hour-long video of a platoon of police officers posing in fidgety silence for the camera. In a piece for *The Guardian* the other day, she explained how she'd seen a chap on a beach firing a gun at a passing 747 and how this represented a complicated statement about impotence and technology. Ms Wearing can be relied on to make an installation out of anything.

Since it was well after 11 pm when I tuned in, I feared I might have missed the Turner Prize ceremony, but evidently I had not. For there on screen was the most chillingly satirical installation piece you could wish for, a portrayal of the British art world with the title, "Is Painting Dead?". It took the form of a "discussion", by turns hilarious and surreal, among a group of grotesquely lampooned "art commissioners" - some vaguely identifiable. One man bore a resemblance to Sir Norman Rosenthal, the eminent boss of the Royal Academy; but had been transformed (with some satirical intent, presumably) into a figure of Petronian

decadence, both cheeks emblazoned with lipstick kisses. Another figure looked as if it might once have been Roger Scruton, the distinguished philosopher, but it too had been humorously adjusted to resemble a dandified cadaver in a marmalade fright wig and a wing collar. A growly Burl Ives wannabe with a beard did a passable impersonation of David Sylvester, but the only really lifelike one was Waldemar Januszczak, late of the *Late Show*. A vision of stumpy art-college-debating-society contentiousness in a yellow bow-tie, he was just like the real thing.

And then there was the Tracey Emin figure. This was a puzzle. One knows that the real Ms Emin is a warm and clever artist with a sense of humour (for one of her exhibits, she embroidered the names of her past lovers into the fabric of a tent) but how could you square this with the apparition that appeared on screen? It was muttering and mumbling and giggling to itself while the others were talking, and it was clearly, how shall I put this, as pissed as a parrot. But as the discussion went on, you got the impression the whole thing had been conceived on a tidal wave of alcohol.

The "art critics" acted up for the camera in a way I found, frankly, over the top. I mean nobody talks like that, do they? "They're so of their time, they transcend their time," said Norman Rosenthal about some pictures. Scruton said petulantly that "video art doesn't share in transcendence", and

Januszczak snarled, "Yeah, but does art have to be transcendence?" In his best sixth-form manner, Richard Cork, immaculate and aloof, intoned things like, "Of course we're still learning about photography...". But then the true, self-detonating nature of the whole piece was revealed when Tracey Emin suddenly exploded. Her plustered mutterings having been politely ignored for some minutes, she suddenly said, "I'm going now. I've had a nice evening with my friends. I'm drunk. My Mum won't like this, but I don't give a ****," and tore the microphone off the

'Can we divide literature into constituent parts, and offer prizes for them? Will we get Best Indexer in a Russian History?'

front of her dress. "I don't give a toss about any of this lot, but I think he's really lovely," she yelped in conclusion, pointing dramatically towards Januszczak who grinned broadly as if he'd won a prize. But sadly, it seemed Ms Emin was pointing at the cameraman behind him...

It was brilliant television. It was, indeed, a work of art. What- ever actually won the Turner Prize, this well-sustained satire of art self-absorption was worth £20,000 of anyone's money.

All over literary London, people are busily reading, or claiming to read, Don DeLillo's massive new novel *Underworld*.

a fictional panorama of America in the Cold War years. It has become the big You-should-have-read-it-by-now choice of the Christmas period. Even though it's not actually published until 9 January, the more determinedly *à la page* of bookish commentators are singing its praises in the *Books of the Year* (that's 1997) features that now festoon every weekend newspaper.

I'm sure the book is a work of genius, but you can't feel anything about these early critics, queuing up importantly to declare it a masterpiece, are behaving as though they've some-

how *invented* Mr DeLillo and his book, and are congratulating themselves on their excellent taste in doing so. Even if you haven't read all that much: "I'm halfway through Don DeLillo's *Underworld*", ran one of the *Books of 1997* offerings in *The Observer*, "and on the basis of what I've read so far, it feels safe to predict..." (Love that word "safe"). But then, partial reviews of unfeasibly large talent is something DeLillo has come to expect from his critics at home, judging by the American notices that have greeted his 832-page doorstep: "*Underworld* is full of sentences that capture, with the choice of the odd word, a moment in

American history" said one. "He captures the drift of the end-of-century life in words, one bright shining sentence after another" said *Elle*. (So that's how you write prose.) Some kind of consensus seemed to be nigh, and the *Voice Literary Supplement* came out and said it, plain and simple: "Don DeLillo is now the best writer of sentences in America".

Now there's a critical trope worth remembering. Faced with a difficult 800-page novel, don't try to review it as a novel, but as a succession of sentences. As you might say, "Frank Sinatra sang 'Strangers in the Night'. It contained some extremely fine notes, one after the other" or "The Berlin Philharmonic performed Mahler's first symphony last night, with some shining violin bits followed by some wonderful oboe bits".

But can they be onto something? Can there be a new critical hierarchy abroad, now that the idea of "good fiction" has become divorced from the idea of "good writing"? Can we divide literature into constituent parts, and offer prizes for them, like Hollywood's technical Oscars? Will we get Best Footnote Writer in A Biography? Best Indexer in a Russian History? Best Humorous Caption Writer in a Political Memoir? Or shall we be serious about it? If I were to say that Salman Rushdie writes the best pages in the modern novel, Martin Amis writes the best paragraphs and Iain Sinclair writes the best sentences... There now. What do you think?



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FINANCIAL JOURNAL OF THE YEAR

Blair calls halt to gas-fired power stations as coal crisis mounts

The Government last night attempted to defuse the deepening crisis over the fate of the coal industry by announcing a moratorium on further approvals of gas-fired power stations. But as Chris Godsmark and Anthony Bevis report, ministers admitted the ban would do nothing to solve the looming industry shake-out when existing supply contracts with power generators expire next spring.

The unexpected change of policy was unveiled by Tony Blair, in Prime Minister's Questions, yesterday afternoon, just before John Battle, the Energy Minister, faced MPs before the Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee.

Mr Blair told the Commons that the country's energy policy was too important "to be left simply to short-term market forces". But he warned that the moratorium on new gas-fired stations was "no panacea" for the mining industry's problems.

Labour MPs from mining constituencies have been perplexed by the lack of a coherent energy policy since the Government took office. They hope that the RJB Mining threat of up to 5,000 redundancies will force Ministers to grasp the need for urgency, and that yesterday's announcement was the first instalment.

Labour MPs, especially on the left of the party, were delighted, but the Tories were unimpressed. John Redwood, the Conservative spokesman, said in a later statement: "Given the imminence of pit closures and job losses, we don't want a review, we want an answer. The energy industry needs to know whether there will be licenses for more gas stations, or not. It needs to plan for its future investment,

and the coal industry needs to know whether it has any future at all."

Mr Battle said the Government would embark on a review of the long-term security of supply and fuel diversity in the power market and was deferring decisions on outstanding applications to build gas-fired power stations until the investigation was completed. A moratorium, which the Government had previously rejected, was one of the main demands of coal producers, who claimed the dash for gas by power generators was forcing coal out of the market.

It emerged that the decision on a moratorium was taken at the highest level of government yesterday morning. A DTI submission to the committee, dated 2 December, made no mention of the move, instead stating the previous Government policy which was to consider each application on a case by case basis.

Mr Battle told a committee room packed with industry executives, union officials, and miners that he made the move after seeing press reports suggesting National Grid was concerned about the over-dependence on gas power in the future. "Put very simply it's about... whether we can keep the lights on reliably... that means not becoming over dependent on one fuel," said Mr Battle.

But he insisted the policy would offer no immediate help to the coal industry next April, when high price long-term contracts with generators expire. "I have never argued that this is a panacea in the short term to get through sorting those contracts."

The moratorium puts the future of 27 gas-fired power station applications in serious doubt. Together they total 7.8 gigawatts of new capacity, enough to displace more than 20 million tonnes of coal.

Mr Battle was forced to vigorously defend his energy policy against union criticisms that he had not done enough to help the coal industry but he reiterated to MPs that there could be no government subsidies for RJB Mining, which owns most UK pits, and the Government could not intervene in the company's private negotiations with generators.



A rare newt, an unusual form of grass - but above all the Labour government - was yesterday blamed for the threatened closure of Whitmore Colliery in North Yorkshire. Underground workers from the pit who accompanied the official union delegations to London for yesterday's meeting of the Commons Select Committee, felt the future of their mine was out of their hands. Conservationists had stopped development of coal reserves under the River Derwent because of the danger to flora and fauna, but the main problem was that the Government, after 18 years in Opposition and

seven months in power, had shown itself incapable of developing a balanced energy policy. The disgruntled men of Whitmore, which is part of the Selby complex, attended a rally at the House of Commons (above), but later encountered a long queue for the Committee hearing and opted for the pub instead. London prices of £2-plus for a pint added little to their good humour. John Drury, a 32 year old face worker at Whitmore, detected that ministers may have just begun to listen to mineworkers. "If the Government doesn't get up off its arse, there's little doubt our pit is

doomed," he said. The miners of Whitmore were among hundreds of pitmen who came down the M1 in coaches from Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire to lobby Parliament yesterday. Terry Allinson, NUM delegate from Kellingley Colliery, Yorkshire, told the rally that he did not accept Labour MPs' arguments that it was difficult for ministers to develop a balanced energy policy. "Are they saying that I should go back to Kellingley four weeks before Christmas and tell the men they don't have a future?"

Barrie Clement
Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

Bass embarks on £2bn international acquisition trail

Bass said yesterday it had earmarked £2bn to spend on acquisitions. Andrew Yates assesses the likely targets and reflects on mounting speculation that the group is about to launch a huge disposal programme.

Sir Ian Prosser, Bass' chairman, said yesterday: "We are looking to expand the group internationally and we will look for acquisitions... to move along that path." He said Bass was particularly keen to expand Bass' hotel businesses in continental Europe and the Far East.

"We would look at group's of hotels as well as individual sites at the right price," he added.

Analysts believe Bass has been eyeing up European acquisitions for the last few months including the Inter-Continental chain. However, the strong recovery in the hotel market has seen the value of hotel chains rise rapidly and the group has been forced to look further afield for opportunities. One analyst said: "The economic problems in the Far East has resulted in prices falling over there."

The group is understood to have ruled out a share buy back for the time being while it hunts for purchases. "We know our shareholders will be pleased if we can make a strategic acquisition," Sir Ian said.

Bass is continuing to look for acquisitions in the pub business. But it ruled out buying Merrydown, the troubled cider and aleopac maker which is currently under a bid spotlight.

Bass also unveiled plans to create 5,000 new jobs. It is pending £680m on a huge pension programme. £300m

has been allocated for its pub business. Its established themed pubs such as O'Neills, its Irish bar chain and All Bar One, will be rolled out rapidly. Bass will also pump money into new chains such as the upmarket brand Bar Coast and its A Scream student pubs. It hopes to double the number of branded pubs in its estate to more than 1,000 within two years.

In addition Bass will roll out its upmarket Crown Plaza hotel chain across Europe and is actively seeking new franchises for its Holiday Inn brand.

However, Bass' pre-tax profits for the year to September fell 29 per cent fall to £477m due to a £177m write down in the value of Gala, its bingo business. Industry sources believe the move is a forerunner to the sale of the business. Several venture capitalist groups are understood to be vying to buy Gala for around £250m.

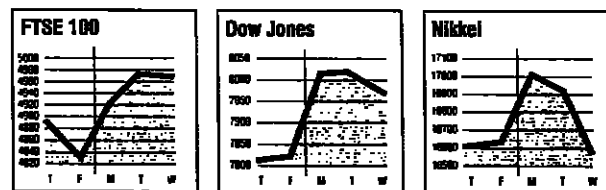
The Government's decision to block the acquisition of fellow brewer Carlsberg-Jetley also cost the group £35m.

That said, underlying operating profits rose to £796m (£752m). Coral, its betting chain, had a great year. Profits more than doubled to £33m thanks to the introduction of new games such as 49s and the introduction of slot machines in bookies. Beer profits rose 7 per cent to £168m in a static market due to the strong performance of leading brands such as Carling. However, sales of Hooper's Hooch, the leading aleopac brand, fell 13 per cent as the market for the controversial alcoholic soft drinks fell off a cliff as large retailers pulled them off their shelves.

Bass has put 175 of its tenanted pubs up for sale. It indicated that further sales were likely and speculation is mounting that it could sell its entire tenanted estate.

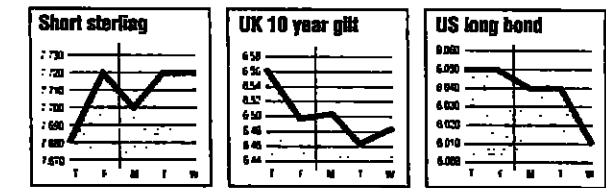
Investment column, p24

STOCK MARKETS



Indices	Close	Change	Change(%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield(%)
FTSE 100	4970.70	-6.90	-0.14	5367.30	3892.70	3.54
FTSE 250	4692.40	24.00	0.51	4983.80	4231.80	3.40
FTSE 350	2396.30	-0.30	-0.01	2570.50	1938.70	3.61
FTSE All Share	2341.85	-0.03	0.00	2507.68	1942.22	3.50
FTSE SmallCap	2276.9	3.90	0.17	2407.40	2127.50	3.36
FTSE 100/250	1244.5	0.90	0.07	1346.50	1198.70	3.39
FTSE 100/350	980.1	-1.50	-0.15	1135.00	955.90	1.07
Dow Jones	7871.33	-47.50	-0.60	8258.03	6238.06	1.71
Nikkei	16585.51	-324.78	-1.92	21001.90	14958.13	0.93
Hang Seng	11207.56	-8.77	-0.08	16820.31	8775.88	3.79
Dax	4082.89	9.93	0.24	4459.89	2760.76	1.80

INTEREST RATES

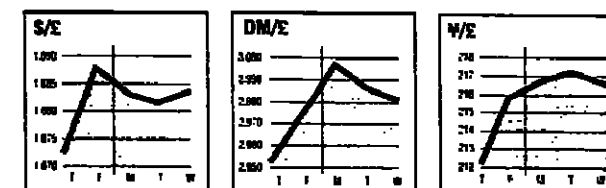


Money Market Rates	2 month	3 month	6 month	1 year	1 yr chg	18 year	1 yr chg	Long bond	1 yr chg
UK	7.75	7.25	7.00	6.50	0.48	6.40	-0.95	6.40	-1.06
US	5.94	5.44	5.05	4.35	5.83	4.25	6.01	4.25	-0.38
Japan	0.72	0.23	0.80	0.21	1.88	-0.85	2.53	-0.85	-0.85
Germany	3.78	0.52	4.09	0.80	5.42	-0.19	5.98	-0.58	-0.58

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Price (pt)	Chg (pt)	% Chg	Falls	Price (pt)	Chg (pt)	% Chg
BICC	174.50	12.50	7.72	Great Unit Store	985.00	-30.00	-3.04
Sainsbury	807.50	43.00	5.35	Hardy Oilfields	264.00	-10.00	-3.64
Sainsbury	1407.00	70.50	5.27	Carlton Comm	485.50	-17.50	-3.62
Royal and Sun	587.00	27.00	4.62	Lonica Group	107.50	-4.00	-3.58

CURRENCIES



Pound	at 3pm	Change	% Chg	Dollar	at 3pm	Change	% Chg
Dollar	1.8843	+0.18c	1.5355	Sterling	0.5937	-0.006	0.6105
D-Mark	2.9807	-0.48c	2.5600	D-Mark	1.7697	-0.54c	1.5565
Yen	216.80	+0.05	186.40	Yen	128.60	-0.10	113.35
E index	105.30	-0.10	93.70	S index	107.50	+3.20	98.10

OTHER INDICATORS

at 3pm	Close	Chg	Yr Ago	Index	Chg	Yr ago	Index
Brent Oil (\$)	17.86	-0.15	23.72	GDP	113.90	3.80	109.7
Gold (\$)	292.05	-2.70	367.85	RPI	159.50	3.7	153.81
Silver (\$)	5.32	0.00	4.71	Base Rates	7.25	6.00	

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source: Bloomberg

British Midland to fly London-Manchester

British Midland, the country's second biggest scheduled airline, is set to break British Airways' monopoly on the London-Manchester route by launching a rival service next year. As Michael Harrison reports, the arrival of a second carrier also poses a threat to Richard Branson's Virgin Trains.

Heathrow-Manchester is the biggest monopoly air route in Europe and also has some of the highest air fares per mile.

US battle for Dewar's looms

Grand Metropolitan and Guinness are expected to surrender their Dewar's Scotch whisky and Bombay gin brands in order to get their £24bn merger past the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

The FTC's decision is likely to fuel a bidding war for Dewar's among some of the world's biggest drinks companies. The opportunity to buy one of the best-selling whiskies in the world will generate intense interest in the industry as it is the biggest whisky brand to come on the market since Guinness made its infamous move for Distillers in 1986.

It also promises to remove the last main obstacle to the deal. The FTC could rule on the bid as early as today, although the two sides remain in discussions and a decision may not be reached until early next week.

The European Commission has already ordered Guinness and GrandMet to dispose of Dewar's in Europe. The FTC's decision means it can market the brand on a world-wide basis.

Analysts estimate that Dewar's makes an annual profit of £50m and is worth at least

£500m. If a bidding war ensues it could fetch up to £700m. Seagram, the Canadian drinks giant, has already expressed its interest in Dewar's. It would dearly love to add a big whisky brand to its extensive spirits portfolio. Allied Domecq is also a likely bidder, not having a large exposure to the US whisky market, as are Bacardi and Pernod-Ricard. Brown Forman and American Brands could also look to add Scotch to their famous bourbons, Jack Daniel's and Jim Beam.

A Guinness spokesman confirmed that several parties had already expressed an interest in acquiring Dewar's.

Dewar's is the best-selling whisky brand in the US with 1.5 million cases shipped annually. John Dewar started selling Dewar's more than 150 years ago. Dewar's White Label struggled during the Prohibition years in the US and became part of the Distillers group in 1925.

Bombay and Bombay Sapphire produce a profit of less than £10m a year and are unlikely to fetch more than £100m.

Andrew Yates

Outlook, page 25

Line earlier this year, will also be watching the development closely since London-Manchester is one of its key markets. So will Railtrack, which is investing £2.1bn to modernise the route.

Virgin is preparing to place a £1bn order for 55 high-speed tilting trains for the line. The trains, due to enter service in 2002, will travel at 140 mph, cutting the journey time between London and Manchester to just two hours.

British Midland now flies to 18 European and UK routes including Paris, Dublin, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Profits this year will exceed the £7.2m recorded in 1996 by a significant margin.

Aviation analysts believe

its long-term strategy in starting up a Manchester service is to cement further links with the German carrier Lufthansa. British Midland already operates the Heathrow-Cologne service on behalf of Lufthansa and could take over Lufthansa's four services from Manchester to Germany once it has an established base at the airport. The four Manchester routes flown by Lufthansa are to Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Munich and Hamburg.

The Scandinavian airline SAS, which owns 40 per cent of British Midland and is a partner of Lufthansa in the Star Alliance, also operates several services into Manchester.

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Rate rise looks less likely as growth in services slackens

New figures have boosted City hopes that the Monetary Policy Committee will not raise interest rates today. But, as Leo Paterson explains, mixed economic signals make the outcome hard to predict.

After a day and a half of deliberation, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will announce at midday today whether interest rates will rise for the sixth time since the general election. Figures out yesterday strengthen the case for leaving rates where they are. Demand is still booming for services, according to a survey by the Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply (CIPS), but the sector is growing at its slowest rate this year.

Dharshini David, economist at HSBC Markets, said: "The figures were slightly weaker than we expected. The signs are that recent monetary policy tightening is taking the steam out of the services sector."

Geoffrey Dicks, economist at NatWest Markets, is among those who believe the recent interest rate hikes have done their job. He said: "The Bank should not raise rates tomorrow. In fact, in six months time we'll be asking how fast rates can come down."

According to CIPS, the business activity index for the services sector fell from 59.1 in October to 57.5 in November. As the index is above 50, that means the sector is still booming. But the fall in the index indicates the pace of growth has decelerated.

Yesterday's figures seem to contradict data released earlier this week. On Monday, it was announced that consumer credit was up by £0.9bn in October, that growth in the UK's manufacturing sector had hit a seven-month high and that, according to the Halifax, house prices grew by 0.9 per cent last month.

These mixed signals have prompted many economists to believe that the Bank should wait until the economic picture clears before moving interest rates again.

"The chances are that the MPC will hold out for a few more months," said Ms David yesterday. She added that, if the Bank were to wait until early next year, the next inflation report, due out in February, could provide it with a justification for raising rates again.

Particularly encouraging in yesterday's CIPS survey of services was that inflation seemed to be under control. Ms David said: "The most striking news was on the inflation front, where the average price balance of 50.0 signified no price rises for the first time since October 1996." Mr Dicks agreed: "The prices number was encouraging."

It was not all good news yesterday, though. A buoyant input cost index - at 56.9 - suggested that skill shortages are putting upward pressure on wages.

This is not the first sign that capacity constraints in the economy could be beginning to bite. On Monday, the CIPS's manufacturing survey found that delivery times, seen by many economists as an indicator of future inflation, were lengthening. "Rising pay costs will ultimately push up input prices and induce a further rise



The Monetary Policy Committee, which met with its full membership for the first time yesterday: (standing, from left) Dr DeAnne Julius, Sir Alan Budd, Professor Charles Goodhart, Ian Plenderleith, Professor Willem Buiter, (seated, from left) Mervyn King, Eddie George, David Clement. Photograph: Rui Xavier

in interest rates," commented ABN Amro. Economists believe that the competitive pressures are acting as the main constraint on prices at present. Peter Thomson, director general of CIPS, said: "Competition is becoming increasingly fierce. For the first time since November 1996 firms have been unable to raise their

prices charged, at a time when their costs continue to rise." NatWest Markets noted: "The one concern is that these competitive pressures may weaken, with firms struggling to meet the existing business flow."

The strong pound is also helping keep a lid on inflation by reducing the cost of

imports, according to some economists. CIBC Wood Gundy noted: "The strong currency keeps any potential upwards price pressure down through smoother input prices."

According to Mr Dicks, the pound is another reason a rate rise is unlikely today. He said a rate rise would push sterling

through the DM3 barrier, a result which would be unpalatable to the MPC.

The committee's two-day meeting, which started yesterday, will be the first full meeting of the committee. Sir Alan Budd, previously in attendance just as an adviser, is now a voting member after relinquishing his previous responsibilities at the Treasury.

Predators move to 'cherry pick' Hambros

The independence of Hambros Bank was hanging in the balance last night when it admitted it had received approaches that could lead to a sale of all its banking operations.

Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, looks at the implications for the former blue-chip name now fallen on hard times.

Hambros said it had received "a number of expressions of interest" from groups interested in acquiring all or part of Hambros Bank following the ap-

pointment of Schroders last month to conduct a review of its performance and operations. It is also negotiating with Belgium's largest bank over the sale of its corporate lending business. It said it was reviewing these approaches and that "any offers for Hambros Bank would be judged against the value which the bank believes could be delivered for shareholders from the continued ownership of Hambros Bank."

Predators are circling Hambros trying to "cherry pick" the most valuable assets, which include the private banking division and the corporate finance side.

However, Hambros stressed that the discussions were not for

the whole group and did not involve the estate agent Hambros Countrywide, Hambros Group Investments or Hambros' stake in Guinness Flight Asset Management. But the sale of all or the best parts of the banking arm would signal the break-up of the group as this is its cultural and financial heart.

Hambros is in exclusive negotiations with Belgium's Générale de Banque over the sale of its corporate lending business where Hambros has been struggling to compete with the larger banks. A deal is expected in the next few weeks. Générale de Banque is keen to expand in Britain where it has around 70 staff in London. It is understood to be keen to

strengthen its investment banking operations ahead of European Monetary Union in 1999. Hambros shares closed 1.5p lower at 265.5p valuing it at £470m.

Hambros has had a terrible year in which its name was tarnished by its involvement in Andrew Regan's unsuccessful break-up bid for the Co-op. The 160-year old bank has been lambasted by shareholders for poor management and under-performance.

One banking analyst said: "It will not be mourned. Why should it be. It is an anachronism and the people who run the bank have not developed it. They will be able to spend more time riding to bounds."

More banking complaints as building societies convert

Bank complaints were up 10 per cent last year, according to the Banking Ombudsman, the watchdog for the sector. Demutualisation of leading building societies, such as Halifax, was at least partly to blame, he said.

The Ombudsman said: "During the year, a significant number of large building societies have become banks. So we cover an ever-increasing number of bank customers and the conversion process itself generates some one-off problems."

In its annual report, released yesterday, the watchdog also called for more harmonisation between the various financial services ombudsmen.

One of the weaknesses of the current system is in dealing with so-called "mixed complaints" involving more than one financial services sector, such as banking and insurance. Currently, there are five ombudsman schemes covering different sectors.

In the year to September, the Ombudsman received 8,818 written complaints, 774 higher than in the previous year. Lending, either because customers believed they had wrongly been refused loans or because facilities had been withdrawn at short notice, remained the most common source of complaints.

— Leo Paterson

IMF package for South Korea largest in history

The International Monetary Fund yesterday announced the details of its planned \$55bn rescue package for the South Korean economy - the largest in the organisation's history. The accord was made following 10 days of tough negotiations. "In view of the importance of [South] Korea in the world economy, I will ask the IMF board to support this programme to the amount of \$21bn," said Michel Camdessus of the IMF. The IMF tranche of the rescue will be three-year standby loans of \$21bn. The World Bank is considering a \$10bn contribution and the Asian Development Bank \$4bn. Contributions amounting to \$30bn are expected from Japan, France, Canada, Australia, Germany, the UK and the US.

Accounting rules change

The Accounting Standards Board today brings to an end a decade-long saga with the publication of new rules on accounting for purchased goodwill and intangible assets, such as licences, franchises and brands. Financial Reporting Standard 10, which comes into effect for financial years ending after 23 December 1998, will replace SSAP22, which allows companies to choose between accounting treatments. Accountants believe it could lead to companies that are planning deals reassessing them to see if they are as likely to enhance earnings as they thought they were. Under the new rules, both acquired goodwill and intangible assets will be capitalised on the balance sheet. Outlook, page 25

ScS directors to make £15m

Three directors of ScS will share more than £15m when the Sunderland-based furniture retailer floats on the stock market next week. The chief executive, Mike Brown, together with the sales director, Neville Pappiatt, and the finance director, Irvin Bamford, will sell a 45 per cent stake in the business upon flotation but will retain the remaining 55 per cent. The shares will be priced at 105p, valuing the company at £33m. No fresh funds will be raised.

Greenwich project approved

The London Borough of Greenwich has decided to grant outline planning permission to its Greenwich Reach 2000 Limited joint venture to build a mixed development on an eight-acre site. The Greenwich Reach 2000 scheme is located on land fronting the Thames and bordered by Deptford Creek and Thames Street, close to the Cutty Sark. The project will provide some 590,000 sq ft of leisure, entertainment, retail and restaurant facilities.

Talks end at John Tams

John Tams, the household goods group, said yesterday talks which might have led to an offer being made for the company had ended. "The company is well structured after the recent rationalisation programme. Various additional initiatives and products have also been introduced and these provide us with strengths and opportunities," said Gerald Tams, company chairman.

Rolls wins \$290m in orders

Allison Engine, the US subsidiary of Rolls-Royce, has won orders with a potential value of more than \$290m (£172m) for aero engines and industrial start systems. It said contracts signed for the purchase of 32 AE 2100-powered Lockheed Martin C-130J aircraft would be worth more than \$250m to the company. The Italian Air Force will buy 18 of the four-engine aircraft and the US Department of Defense has ordered 14 of the aircraft. It said Allison had also received an order with a potential value of \$42m from the US Navy to provide industrial start systems for DDG-51 destroyers.

Friendly society buys policies

Liverpool Victoria Friendly Society is buying the majority of household and motor policies of Landmark Insurance Company, part of American International Group. Landmark has more than 230,000 direct policies in force, accounting for annual premiums in excess of £40m.

Residents start a company to build their own pub

Fancy owning your own local pub? That is precisely what the residents of Witney in Oxfordshire are aiming to do. Not only that - they plan to build the pub from scratch.

Fed up with waiting for the local council to build a new pub, 12 enterprising residents of the West Witney estate have clubbed together to form Community Pub, their own public quoted company.

This week they posted prospectuses to all 1,250 households on the estate. They want to sell shares in the new group to raise half of the £415,000 they need to build the pub.

If they raise enough support they hope to borrow the rest of

the money from the bank. Prospective buyers are being wooed with offers of cheap drinks and free meals if the pub gets off the ground.

Mike Freer, co-founder of Community Pub, said yesterday: "A pub has been planned as part of the estate ever since I moved here. We really need a new local."

If Community Pub is successful, the residents of West Witney estate are unlikely to stop there.

— Andrew Yates

Classic FM may expand into finance

GWR, the acquisitive commercial radio group, is considering expanding its Classic FM brand into financial services. It also hopes to take the radio station, which made its first profit this year, around the world. Cathy Newman reports on GWR's plans for Classic.

Ralph Bernard, GWR's chief executive, said yesterday he was looking at extending the Classic FM brand into other products such as financial services. The station already has its own magazine and a joint venture classical music label.

"We'll look at anything that will extend the value of the brands we own," Mr Bernard said, adding that financial services was one area being looked at.

"That is one area where there's potential as more than 10 per cent of Classic's advertising revenue is from financial services."

Mr Bernard said that listeners had developed a close relationship with the classical radio station, and that related services under the Classic FM brand name would win people's trust.

"The relationship we have with listeners is very different from other media. Radio is a friend to listeners," he said. Radio groups which have

tried to expand into unrelated areas have had their fingers burnt in the past.

Capital Radio, for example, upset the City when it acquired the My Kinda Town restaurant chain last year. Mr Bernard yesterday ruled out any involvement with the restaurant business.

Classic FM, which GWR bought for more than £70m last year, made an operating profit of £1.8m for the six months to the end of September.

It launched in South Africa in September and now has a 5 per cent share of the market there. Mr Bernard said he hoped to take the station to other territories soon.

However, the management focus on reorganising Classic

FM hit revenue growth at some of the local stations. GWR disclosed yesterday.

Local advertising revenues were virtually flat, which was in part because of a high turnover of senior staff at the local stations. However, the group added that the local markets had been performing better since the end of the half year.

For the six months, GWR reported a 27 per cent increase in profits before tax to £6.1m. The shares edged up 0.5p to 174p.

GWR confirmed its commitment to digital radio by establishing a new division to look at the new technology. The company is expected to put in a bid for the licence to run national digital radio services.

Video setback knocks Carlton shares

A downturn in profits at Carlton Communications' video division and worries over the costs and uncertainties of digital television sent shares in the media group sharply lower yesterday. But, as Cathy Newman reports, Carlton does not share the City's scepticism and is confident it will be granted a licence for British Digital Broadcasting (BDB), its digital TV joint venture with Granada, by Christmas.

Carlton's shares shed 17.5p to close at 465.5p after its video business suffered from the strength of sterling and an absence of blockbuster titles. Operating profit in the division for the year to the end of September was 8 per cent lower at £67.7m.

However, Michael Green, chairman, said that although the performance of the video market had been disappointing, next year should pick up. "For the first two months of this year, prospects in the video division are looking up," he said.

Neil Blackley, media analyst at Merrill Lynch, shaved his profits forecast for next year by £15m to £330m, mainly because of higher-than-expected launch costs at BDB. Mr Blackley said Carlton had indicated that its share of BDB's losses would amount to £25m next year.

Despite analysts' scepticism, Carlton appeared enthusiastic about BDB, although the company admitted it had expected the licence to have been granted by now. Mr Green suggested yesterday that the European Commission, which is investigating the joint venture, would clear BDB by Christmas in time for a launch in the fourth quarter of next year.

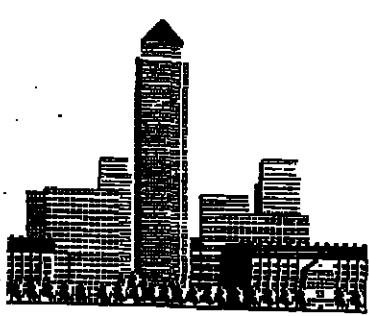
In order to satisfy the commission, some changes are certain to be made. These

are expected to include a stipulation that Gerry Robinson, chairman of both Granada and BSkyB, cannot sit on the board of BDB. BSkyB's seven-year programme supply contract is also likely to be cut to five years, although Carlton denied such a move would entitle the satellite broadcaster to additional financial compensation. BSkyB was paid £75m after the competition authorities forced it to drop its equity stake in BDB.

Carlton confirmed it had taken a £10.4m hit from its television interests in Singapore and India. The company made a £6.4m provision after writing down its investment in Home TV, an Indian satellite channel. It also sustained a £4m charge from the closure of Channel KTV, a karaoke music television business based in Singapore.

For the year to the end of September, Carlton reported profits before tax and losses on the two overseas channels of £326.7m, 10 per cent higher than the year before.

COMPANY RESULTS				
	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Black (F)	75.09m (83.83m)	12.9m (15.3m)	29.1p (33.4p)	9.5p (14.9p)
BTG (F)	9.0m (12.13m)	4.19m (0.170m)	4.05p (0.13p)	nil
Carlton (F)	1.74b (1.67b)	325.7m (295.7m)	31.4p (28.5p)	12.4p (11.09p)
Deutsche Telekom (F)	- (-)	0.510m (0.175m)	1.0p (1.0p)	nil
Euro Group (F)	44.04m (48.78m)	1.54m (0.748m)	10.4p (5.4p)	2.3p (1.5p)
Full Circle (F)	13.7m (7.2m)	0.791m (1.38m)	0.73p (1.33p)	nil
Gibson Group (F)	17.5m (18.09m)	1.371m (0.778m)	8.5p (4.8p)	2.5p (2.5p)
GWR Group (F)	25.22m (20.98m)	6.06m (4.75m)	3.9p (3.7p)	1.3p (0.97p)
Heath (F)	24.15m (19.38m)	1.54m (1.30m)	1.2p (15.9p)	3.2p (-)
Samuel Heath (F)	5.13m (4.73m)	0.405m (0.288m)	8.0p (3.0p)	3.5p (2.0p)
V4 Lovell (F)	226.7m (254.3m)	1.54m (11.76m)	7.0p (32.5p)	nil
WPP (F)	- (-)	165.8m (140.2m)	27.9p (22.5p)	14.75p (20.0p)
WPP Focus Group (F)	25.4m (18.1m)	3.84m (1.098m)	17.6p (4.5p)	nil
Wrightsday (F)	23.78m (18.82m)	2.42m (1.303m)	14.3p (8.1p)	3.5p (2.5p)
Yates (F)	17.6m (12.9m)	1.87m (1.3m)	1.67p (1.42p)	0.35p (0.30p)
Quintilly (F)	11.58m (5.22m)	1.1m (0.403m)	0.92p (0.90p)	nil
SES Group (F)	73.2m (59.7m)	3.3m (2.6m)	12.8p (11.2p)	2.85p (5.1p)
TG (F)	25.2m (25.5m)	1.135m (1.008)	4.1p (3.9p)	1.2p (1.15p)
(F) - Final (F) - Interim EPS is pre-exceptionals Dividend to be paid as a FD				



OUTLOOK ON THE FUTURE OF COAL, FINANCIAL REPORTING STANDARDS AND THE SALE OF DEWAR'S

Truth the first casualty of Battle of the Budge

Tony Blair could have stood up at the despatch box yesterday and laid it on the line to Richard Budge. So could his Energy Minister, John Birt, when he appeared before MPs on the Trade and Industry Select Committee. Unfortunately, without a policy on coal, much less one on energy, that was not an option available to either of them.

The Government could have summoned up all its courage, stared Old Labour in the face, and admitted that coal has no future. It could have said that the market, the mood and the times have moved fatally against coal and that no amount of subsidy, intervention or rigging of the market will save the pits.

It could have admitted that its environmental obligations take priority and that if Britain is serious about reducing greenhouse gases then coal has very little role to play in meeting our energy needs. Finally, it could have said that while 5,000 miners' jobs will probably be gone by next spring, the Government is funding an energy efficiency drive that will replace all those lost jobs and more.

Mr Budge and his unlikely new-found friends, the miners who had followed him down to Westminster from the coalfields of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, got none of this. Instead what Mr Blair and Mr Budge gave them was a sop in the shape of a moratorium on approving any further gas-fired power stations and a pledge that Britain's long-term energy needs are "too important to be left to short-term market forces".

Mr Budge knows that the moratorium

is meaningless and the pledge almost certainly so much hot air. Mr Budge knows it too because he admitted as much in the Commons less than a fortnight ago. There are already enough gas-fired stations being built to replace half the output of the English coalfields. What's more, there are enough consents granted for new stations to wipe out what is left, some of them sanctioned since Labour came to power.

For all his dislike of "short-term market forces", Mr Blair shows little stomach for short-term intervention. For his part, Mr Budge's plan to build a new generation of "clean" coal fired stations looks a non-starter unless he digs deep into his own pocket. Luckily for New Labour and Mr Blair, Old Labour dislikes Mr Budge as much as anyone. Oh how much easier it is to pin the blame on the "millionaire Budge" than admit that the Government has no proper long-term energy policy.

No easy way to value goodwill

Another of those gloriously complicated Financial Reporting Standards (FRSs) was rolled out by Sir David Tweedie's accounting workshop yesterday. This is FRS number 10, and like previous models, it is mindbogglingly technical. It tells companies how to account for "goodwill and intangible assets". According to Sir David, it is one of the Accounting Standards Board's longest-running projects - "a major problem for the ASB and its predecessor, the Accounting Standards Committee".

It is not hard to see why. After all those years of work, the ASB has failed to come up with a meaningful solution to the problem of accounting for goodwill. The whole point of the ASB and its Financial Reporting Standards is to introduce transparency and comparability into company accounts after the accounting scandals of the 1980s. Unfortunately, FRS 10, while well intentioned enough, seems likely to fail almost completely in this task.

The ASB's starting point is reasonable enough. When companies acquire each other they generally do so at a value considerably in excess of the book value of the assets. The problem then arises of how to account for this excess, or "goodwill value". In most cases, the goodwill is immediately written off against reserves. This approach is open to criticism for two reasons.

First, it causes the acquirer's net worth to be depleted or even eliminated. This in turn has encouraged companies to reduce the amounts attributed to purchased goodwill by separately valuing brands and other intangible assets in the balance sheet, resulting in some bizarre distortions. For instance, Burger King is listed as an asset on the balance sheet because it was bought by Grand Metropolitan, while McDonald's, as an internally-generated asset, has no value on its balance sheet whatsoever.

The second criticism is that it allows the acquirer to overstate the rates of return achieved on the acquired assets. A new and much lower base line is established which unduly flatters subsequent performance. That's why these tech-

niques were so commonly used in the 1980s.

The solution proposed by the ASB is to capitalise the goodwill as an asset on the balance sheet. Simple enough, so where's the problem? Unfortunately that's just the start. Most goodwill and intangible assets will be presumed to have a life of 20 years and will be written off over that period. But some assets will have a more limited life and will be written off over a shorter period of time. And in yet other cases a longer or indefinite life may be assigned, but only if the durability of the asset can be demonstrated. A whole separate FRS is to be produced on what criteria are to be used to determine the life of an asset.

What on earth is all this mumbo jumbo about and who is it meant to help? As the description implies, an intangible asset - such as a brand or a particularly talented employee - is, well, an intangible asset and any attempt to value it is bound to be a wholly subjective thing. It is not something that can or should be attempted in company accounts. The whole business of determining how much a company is or is not worth should be left where it belongs - with the judgement of investors.

Dewar's won't end up in Scotland

Best-selling liquor brands like Dewar's so rarely come on the market that hardly anyone can remember the last time it happened. So the sale of this top-selling scotch, which

is being forced on Guinness by competition authorities in Europe and the US as the price of the company's merger with Grand Metropolitan, should be quite a spectacle. With annual profits of around £60m, analysts expect the brand to be knocked out for anything up to £700m, depending on what in the way of distilleries and bottling plants the Federal Trade Commission in the US stipulate must be attached to the sale. Dewar's is a comparatively unknown brand in the UK, but in the US it is the number one best seller.

The prospect of such a treasure coming on the market is causing some understandable excitement north of the border, where suddenly there is the possibility of creating an independent scotch whisky company of some size once more, reversing 70 years of consolidation and takeover from the Sassenach and the foreigner. Och, the thought of it.

Unfortunately, this is a dream likely to be as transitory as the Scottish mist. This is quite a bite for any venture capitalist, but on top of the £700m asking price, the purchaser would also have to demonstrate to the competition authorities funds adequate to support and develop the brand in the US and Europe. An alternative would also need to be found to the Guinness/LVMH distribution network around the world. That wouldn't be impossible but it would mean surrendering quite a bit of the brand's profit margin to someone else. All of which makes it much more likely that Dewar's will end up as a trade sale to one of the world's established drink producer/distributors. Shame.

Hostile £188m Canadian bid set to capture Wamoungs printing group

Wamoungs yesterday became the subject of a hostile bid from its Canadian rival Quebecor Printing. Although the printing group wants to retain its independence, Peter Thal Larsen says disappointed shareholders are unlikely to back the company's beleaguered management.

The bid values Wamoungs at 257p a share, or £188.3m, a premium of 30.1 per cent to the closing share price the day before the bid. Wamoungs shares promptly surged to 287.5p,

suggesting that investors expect the company to squeeze a higher price out of Quebecor.

However, the bid was overshadowed by the news that Pierre Peladeau, Quebecor's chairman, 72, had suffered a heart attack late on Tuesday night. He is currently in a coma in a Montreal hospital.

Charles Cavell, president of Quebecor's international operations, suggested that the group would be likely to pay more for an agreed deal. "We are still very keen to secure the Wamoungs board's approval," he said. "My door is always open."

Agreement looked unlikely, however, after Wamoungs' board unanimously advised investors to reject the offer, suggesting that the company had

turned the corner. "The action we have taken is bearing fruit," the chief executive, Patrick Walker, said. "The future of this business is best as an independent organisation."

The two parties held exploratory talks about a deal earlier this week. According to Quebecor, they foundered over Wamoungs' price expectations, which it said were "wholly unrealistic". Wamoungs shares have fallen sharply this year after the group, which prints *Hello!* and *The Sunday Times* magazines, among others, issued two profit warnings in short succession.

Analysts said that shareholders were unlikely to back the management's bid to remain independent. "Wamoungs is rudderless, it has a very old

board, and will have to invest large amounts of capital in the next few years," said one expert. "Being left without a bidder would be a terrifying prospect for Wamoungs shareholders."

Quebecor said consolidation was necessary in the fragmented European market. The continent has 71 separate printers, while the US has just four. "The market is one market. It is not a dream but a reality," Mr Cavell said. He also said that printers would have to install larger printing presses to remain competitive. But Wamoungs rejects this. It argues that for time-sensitive printing projects, such as magazines, the market is not international. "Size for size's sake is not part of our strategy," Mr Walker said.

Midshires 'offers poor deal' as customers wait for takeover

Birmingham Midshires, the building society preparing for takeover by Royal Bank of Scotland, came under fire from a consumer group for offering a poor deal to its members. The attack came as Portman Building Society announced it was lowering investment limits originally raised to combat carpetbaggers. Nic Cunniff reports.

The attack on Midshires from *Which?*, the consumer magazine, alleges the society is keeping its members guessing on the precise takeover date in order to hold on to them as customers. Meanwhile, they pay over the odds on their home loans and receive less interest on savings than is available from other societies.

Which? yesterday published figures showing that in the 10 months to November this year, Midshires' branch-based Quantum Instant Plus account paid just 0.9 per cent on deposits of £2,500. By contrast, the average rate paid by the five largest societies is 3.7 per cent.

However, Mike Jackson, chief executive at Birmingham Midshires, yesterday denied his society was uncompetitive: "Our Quantum Instant Plus account is one of the best of its type, especially at higher balance levels. No financial organisation can offer top rates at every tier, even the mutuals."

Mr Jackson said the takeover of his society by Royal Bank of Scotland was a "very complex project to bring to fruition". His comments came as Portman announced it would lower

to £100 the minimum needed to open its Instant Access Account, which confers membership rights on savers. The previous limit of £1,000 was imposed earlier this year to deter carpetbaggers hoping for free shares if the society demutualised or was taken over.

Meanwhile, Skipton Building Society is to present a cheque for £400,000 to the NSPCC, collected from members who have opened accounts in the past six months. The society insisted on a £25 donation to the NSPCC for each account opened, to deter speculators.

Varicose veins breakthrough for BTG

Varicose veins is an unglamorous and unsightly condition affecting not just the elderly. At the moment sufferers who want to bare a leg have little choice but to opt for painful and costly surgery to remove them.

However, the technology group BTG, which reported interim results yesterday, may have found a much more pleasant treatment. BTG, which specialises in hunting out and

licensing intellectual property, has linked up with Dr Juan Cabrera, a Spanish surgeon who has invented a microfoam which painlessly dissolves varicose veins.

The novel foam, which contains known sclerotic agents, is injected into the veins, displacing blood and causing the blood vessels to collapse. The procedure, which has been carried out successfully by Dr

Cabrera on nearly 1,000 men and women in Spain, can be carried out in the doctor's clinic and so is cheaper and quicker than surgery.

According to Ian Harvey, BTG's chief executive, the foam, was hailed as a breakthrough at a key phlebology (varicose veins) conference in Hawaii earlier this year and could be on the market in the UK in two years.

The product is just one of a myriad of promising inventions unearthed by BTG. Another is an advanced system to detect narcotics and explosives in airport luggage. The technology, developed by Kings College, London, has been licensed by BTG to US group Vivid, which screens over 70 per cent of the baggage handled at UK airports.

- Sameena Ahmad

MEPC in sale talks with GE Capital

MEPC, Britain's third-largest property group, said yesterday it was talking to GE Capital about selling its Australian and US businesses.

Speaking as the company announced that pre-exceptional pre-tax profits for the year to September rose 20 per cent to £167m, James Tuckey, the group's chief executive, said that GE Capital, part of General Electric of the US, was "certainly" one of the companies MEPC was talking to in relation to the disposals, initially flagged in September.

The sale, which is likely by next spring, is expected to raise around £1bn. MEPC has said it will return at least £300m of the proceeds to shareholders and is looking to build up its property portfolio in the UK. Mr Tuckey, who has rejected merger proposals from Hamptons and Burford this year, did not rule out the possibility of a merger, but said it was not "actively considering" such a venture.

Lord Blakenham, chairman of MEPC, said that in the UK, property markets were strengthening and its portfolio, which is being focused on the UK market, was "well positioned to ben-

efit". However Mr Tuckey said the company would have to be careful about selecting investments in Britain because "we are obviously approaching the top end of the cycle". Lord Blakenham said the disposal of the Australian business was under way: "We have had considerable interest from a wide range of prospective buyers." He said conditions in the US and Australia were favourable for disposals with a stronger property market in the US and growing interest in the commercial property sector in Australia.

Lord Blakenham said group profits would have been £2m higher at constant exchange rates, but added: "Now that we have decided to sell the overseas businesses, steps have been initiated to limit our exposure to any further strengthening of sterling, particularly against the Australian dollar." MEPC's net asset value after providing for future disposal costs rose 10.4 per cent to 497p. Total return on the group's property portfolio was 19 per cent with the dividend unchanged at 20p. Shares in the company closed 9p higher at 548p.

- Sameena Ahmad

Please take notice that with effect from 4th January 1998 the interest rates applicable to the existing variable rate mortgages (except Mortgage Express based linked mortgages) with the following companies will be increased by 0.25% per annum:

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Shoeburgh Mortgages Limited, Registered in England No. 2405490

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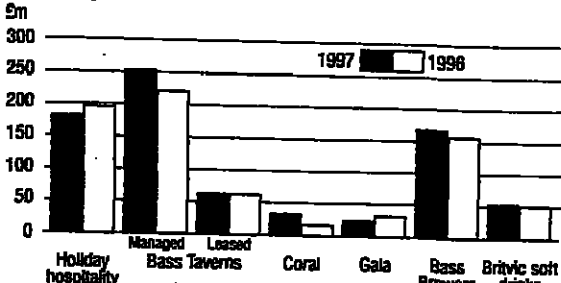
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Bass: At a glance

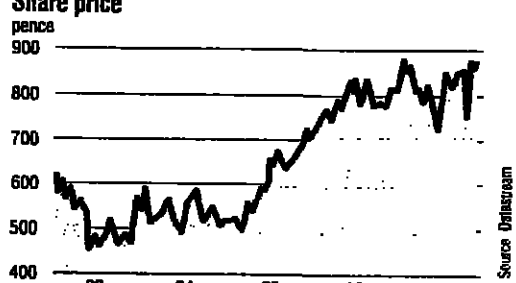
Market value: £7.7bn. Share price 87.45p (+0.50p)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Turnover (£bn)	4.45	4.45	4.54	5.11	5.25
Pre-tax profit (£m)	308	352	599	671	477
Earnings per share (p)	36.3	40.1	43.4	50.4	28.2
Dividends per share (p)	19.8	21.1	22.7	25	27.5

Operating Profit



Share price



Waiting for Bass to spend its cash

What will Bass do with all its spare cash? That was the question on everybody's lips yesterday, overshadowing a decent set of results from the drinks giant. Lack of any definite news on acquisitions or a share buy-back was met with disappointment in the City and the shares rose only half a penny to 87.45p despite underlying operating profits for the year to September coming in slightly above expectations at £796m (£752m).

Bass is establishing a sizeable war chest. It has already earmarked £2bn for acquisitions and could swell its coffers by another £250m if, as expected, it sells Gala and withdraws from the increasingly troubled bingo industry. The final figure at its disposal could be some £3bn if it sells the Coral betting shop chain, having lost out in the bid battle to buy rival William Hill.

As ever, Sir Ian Prosser, Bass's chairman, was coy yesterday about just what stage any acquisition talks had reached. All he would say was that Bass was keen to expand hotel chains in Europe and the Far East.

At least Bass's reluctance to chase the fancy price Nomura paid for William Hill suggests it won't splash out huge amounts of cash on a purchase just for the sake of it.

Bass was also at pains to say its largest institutional shareholders were not desperate for a deal and were quite content to wait for the group to pounce. Nevertheless, if Bass doesn't come up with the goods soon, say within the next 12 months, then it will no doubt be called on to launch a share buy-back. Either way, shareholders should benefit.

In the meantime, Bass's Holiday Inn chain should remain a resilient performer, even in the face of economic woes in the Far East.

As for pubs, Bass may not be getting the sort of returns that Scottish & Newcastle is achieving from its new investment, but it is still making more than 16 per cent.

Merrill Lynch forecasts current-year profits of £779m, putting the shares on a prospective P/E ratio of 14. Good value.

BTG backs the right inventions

BTG is a modern-day gold-digger that has proved a rare find for investors. BTG, established by the Government to encourage the commercialisation of British inventions, has been one of the UK's most spectacularly privatised MBOs. Floated at 225p in 1992, shares in the company soared to almost £27 before a five-for-one stock split.

In the past year their value has risen from just over 420p to hit 790p at one stage. Not that BTG makes profits or pays anything more than a derisory dividend. Yesterday's results, which sent the shares 12.5p higher to 665p, showed net revenues for the half year to September down from £7.6m to £5.1m, £4.2m of losses and increased cash outflow. However for once the City is not banking on the short term. Investors believe in BTG's potential.

BTG has the rights to more than 9,000 patented inventions. Rather than buying the intellectual property, it pays to help their creators establish patents and develop their ideas to the point of attracting licensees. For its investment, BTG earns the rights to milestone payments and royalties. Though headline revenues fell in the period as old products faded, the group's income from royalties grew, suggesting BTG is backing the right inventions. Sales of factor IX for haemophilia, for example, are already well above expectations and should boost second-half figures. Its Torotrax vehicle emission system could prove the big one.

There are concerns. It is in the hands of its licensees whose commitment to any product will vary. The company is also in danger of losing focus given the number of ideas that come before it. However, like a Hollywood film maker, one blockbuster could make its fortune. Given its high and growing level

of up-front investment, BTG is unlikely to break even for at least four years and Kleinwort Benson forecasts £7.5m losses in the full year. However sentiment remains on BTG's side. A long-term bet.

Heal's suffers from listlessness

Heal's has been a dire flotation story. Following its stock market listing in March at 175p, shares in this highbrow furniture retailer shot up to 212.5p within days, but have been tumbling ever since. Yesterday's 4.5p jump to 170p on good results and an upbeat current trading statement hardly compensates for 27 per cent underperformance against the market since its float.

Part of the explanation is a narrow market in the stock. Another is the City's negative attitude towards smaller companies lately. But the real problem is listlessness - a lack of news rather than bad news.

When Heal's floated it said it wanted to add a fourth store to its portfolio as part of a plan to build a chain of up to 10 branches. But eight months later the company has yet to find a suitable site. And if it does not find one within the next two months, the store will not open until after the end of 1998, breaking a pledge in the pre-flotation plan.

Colin Pilgrim, chief executive, and his team have been looking in Glasgow, Manchester and Dublin but have been struggling against high rentals and lack of availability. The problem is that Heal's has failed to expand into the benign, windfall-assisted retail conditions of this country, where house prices and consumer spending and a housing market whose growth is slowing.

All this overshadows a strong trading performance. Pre-tax profits increased by one-third to £2.37m in the year to September. Current trading is also good, with like-for-like sales ahead by 19 per cent. On forecast full-year profits of £2.8m, the shares trade on a forward multiple of 13. Cheaper than the average Heal's napkin ring, but just a hold given uncertainties over the new stores and housing market prospects.

PEOPLE & BUSINESS

JOHN WILLCOCK



First the good news. John Roberts, chief executive of the Post Office, has been elected president of the European Foundation for Quality Management, a prestigious forum of top Euro bosses.

Now the bad: Today's issue of *Which?* magazine rips into the Post Office, accusing it of "parcels left unprotected from would-be thieves, wrong advice on basic enquiries and a haphazard letter redirection service".

The voice of the Consumers' Association thunders: "The Post Office fails to get the stamp of approval from *Which?*"

Malcolm Colver, assistant editor of the mag, concludes: "With no close competitors, the Post Office has little incentive to change. We think the Government should introduce a regulator to set and enforce standards of advice and delivery."

Not much Quality Management there, it would seem. Let's hope for Mr Roberts' sake that not too many copies of the mag reach the Continent in time for his inauguration. On the other hand, if *Which?* is right about the state of the postal service, the chances of copies getting that far seem reassuringly slim.

The cold snap sweeping the country evidently caught the Houses of Parliament unawares yesterday. Somebody had forgotten to turn on the heating in the Grand Committee Room, a bit of a mausoleum at the best of times, in which the Trade & Industry Select Committee was grilling the heads of the power industry.

Despite the resulting Arctic conditions, Graham Brown of National Power, Nick Baldwin of PowerGen and Jim Whelan of Eastern Group did their best to answer the MPs' questions.

Finally Martin O'Neill, the Labour chairman of the committee, could stand it no longer, and left the room to "answer a call of nature" although some cynical journalists decided he

was just going to the men's room for warmth. As Mr O'Neill passed the bench of shivering journeymen, one croaked: "Can't you switch the heating on, Martin?"

The chairman glanced over his shoulder at the three power chiefs and muttered: "Ask them."

Anyone misbehaving at Royal Bank of Scotland had better watch out. The bank has just appointed David Cranston, a former senior Army officer, as its head of group compliance.

This doesn't mean that Mr Cranston will be bayoneting clerks who have been helping themselves to the office paper clips. He has, after all, been head of the Personal Investment Authority's member relations department since returning to Civvy Street in April 1995. Before that he was the Army's deputy chief executive of the multinational airborne division and he also helped monitor the Dubrovnik ceasefire in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr Cranston says his Army background has helped in his current job because of "the management skills and my experience as a senior executive - although my time at the PIA was more compelling".

"The Bank wanted someone to make the compliance department that little bit more proactive," he added. All of which should give Royal Bank employees twitchy shoulder blades.

The Institute of Management has entered enthusiastically into the festive spirit by publishing a small collection of favourite management sayings which it promises "will enable you to bluff your way out of any tight conversational squeeze".

The book, *It's a wise sage...* (that knows his onions) advises: "If at first you don't succeed, redefine success." On the subject of leadership, the collection of *bona mots* says: "If you are never the lead dog, the scenery never changes."

And here's one for the accountants: "Numbers are like people: torture them enough and they'll tell you anything."

The book is available at £4.50 from Lavis marketing. Phone 0345 023736.

A colleague of mine was swapping some light-hearted badinage yesterday with Price Waterhouse's technical partner, Ian Wright, about accounting for goodwill and intangible assets, at the end of which the former enquired: "And how do you spell your name? Like the footballer?"

"Yes, like the footballer. In fact he's my next door neighbour," Mr Wright replied.

It transpires that Mr Wright, the bean counter, lives next to Mr Wright, the striker, arguably Arsenal's most prized intangible asset, and some pot inevitably goes through the wrong letterbox. "I keep getting fan mail and stuff like that for him," said the Price Waterhouse man. "I just wish I got his cheques."

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Spot	1 month	3 month	D-Mark	Spot	1 month	3 month
UK	10000	24806	24847	0.9841	0.9849	0.9857	0.9856	0.9857	0.9857
Australia	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Canada	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
France	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Germany	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Italy	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Japan	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Netherlands	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Spain	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Sweden	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812
Switzerland	24981	24981	24981	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812	1.4812

Other Spot Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Spot	1 month	3 month
Argentina	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Brazil	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Canada	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
France	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Germany	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Italy	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Japan	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Netherlands	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Spain	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Sweden	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Switzerland	12832	10000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

Interest Rates

UK	Germany	US	Japan
Base	7.25%	Discount	2.50%
Prime	5.50%	Prime	5.00%
3 month	5.50%	3 month	5.00%
6 month	5.50%	6 month	5.00%
1 year	5.50%	1 year	5.00%
2 year	5.50%	2 year	5.00%
3 year	5.50%	3 year	5.00%
5 year	5.50%	5 year	5.00%
10 year	5.50%	10 year	5.00%

Money Market Rates

Overnight	1 week	1 month	3 months	6 months	1 year
90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75
90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75
90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75
90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75
90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75	90.75

Life Financial Futures

Contract	Dec-97	Jan-98	Feb-98	Mar-98	Apr-98	May-98	Jun-98	Jul-98	Aug-98	Sep-98	Oct-98	Nov-98	Dec-98
Long GB	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22
Long US	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22
Long Euro	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22
Long Yen	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22	104.22

Commodity Indices

1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
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1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
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1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
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1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
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1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
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1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan	1980	02	1985	Jan	1986	02	1987a	19150
1976	1978	1979	Jan								

28/WORLD CUP DRAW

How the draw will work

Tonight's draw will divide the 32 countries into eight groups of four. The winners and runners-up in each group will progress to the second round. For the purposes of the draw, the teams have been split into four pots:

Seeds: Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Argentina, Romania, Netherlands.

Pot A (Africa and Concacaf): Cameroon, Jamaica, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, South Africa, United States.

Pot B (Europe): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, England, Scotland, Norway, Yugoslavia.

Pot C (South America and Asia): Chile, Colombia, Iran, Japan, Paraguay, Saudi Arabia, South Korea.

Brazil have been named as team A1 and France C1. The other six seeded teams will be drawn in order B1, D1, E1, F1, G1, H1. A draw will determine which pot is drawn next.

Whenever Pot A is drawn the eight teams will be placed in order A-H as they emerge. If Pot B is drawn before Pot C the first eight drawn will be placed A-H as they emerge. The remaining European team will be placed with either Argentina or Brazil (another draw).

When Pot C is drawn the three South American teams will not be drawn with the remaining South American seed (Argentina or Brazil). If Pot C is drawn before Pot B, one European team will be drawn first and placed with either Argentina or Brazil (another draw). Pot C will then be drawn, making sure the three South American teams are not drawn with the remaining South American seed (Argentina or Brazil). In this scenario the remaining eight teams in Pot B can then be placed A-H as they emerge.

Apart from the seeds, each time a team is drawn there will be a mini-draw to determine its place in the allotted group, e.g. B2, B3 or B4.

Group A

1	2	3	4
1 Brazil	2	3	4
Wed 10 June (St Denis, 4.30)	Brazil v A2		
Wed 10 June (Montpellier, 8.0)	A3 v A4		
Tues 16 June (Bordeaux, 4.30)	A2 v A4		
Tues 16 June (Nantes, 8.0)	Brazil v A3		
Tues 23 June (Marseille, 8.0)	Brazil v A4		
Tues 23 June (St Etienne, 8.0)	A2 v A3		

Group B

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
Thurs 11 June (Bordeaux, 4.30)	B1 v B2		
Thurs 11 June (Toulouse, 8.0)	B3 v B4		
Wed 17 June (St Etienne, 4.30)	B2 v B4		
Wed 17 June (Montpellier, 8.0)	B1 v B3		
Tues 23 June (St Denis, 3.0)	B1 v B4		
Tues 23 June (Nantes, 3.0)	B2 v B3		

Group C

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
Fri 12 June (Lens, 4.30)	C3 v C4		
Fri 12 June (Marseille, 8.0)	France v C2		
Thurs 18 June (Toulouse, 4.30)	C2 v C4		
Thurs 18 June (St Denis, 8.0)	France v C3		
Wed 24 June (Lyon, 3.0)	France v C4		
Wed 24 June (Bordeaux, 3.0)	C2 v C3		

Group D

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
Fri 12 June (Montpellier, 1.30)	D3 v D4		
Sat 13 June (Nantes, 1.30)	D1 v D2		
Fri 19 June (Paris, 4.30)	D2 v D4		
Fri 19 June (St Etienne, 8.0)	D1 v D3		
Wed 24 June (Lens, 8.0)	D1 v D4		
Wed 24 June (Toulouse, 8.0)	D2 v D3		

Group E

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
Sat 13 June (Lyon, 4.30)	E3 v E4		
Sat 13 June (St Denis, 8.0)	E1 v E2		
Sat 20 June (Bordeaux, 1.30)	E2 v E4		
Sat 20 June (Marseille, 8.0)	E1 v E3		
Tues 25 June (St Etienne, 3.0)	E1 v E4		
Thurs 25 June (Paris, 3.0)	E2 v E3		

Group F

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
Sun 14 June (St Etienne, 1.30)	F3 v F4		
Mon 15 June (Paris, 8.0)	F1 v F2		
Sun 21 June (Lens, 4.30)	F1 v F3		
Sun 21 June (Lyon, 8.0)	F2 v F4		
Thurs 25 June (Montpellier, 8.0)	F1 v F4		
Thurs 25 June (Nantes, 8.0)	F2 v F3		

Group G

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
Mon 15 June (Marseille, 1.30)	G3 v G4		
Mon 15 June (Lyon, 4.30)	G1 v G2		
Mon 22 June (Montpellier, 4.30)	G2 v G4		
Mon 22 June (Toulouse, 8.0)	G1 v G3		
Fri 26 June (St Denis, 8.0)	G1 v G4		
Fri 26 June (Lens, 8.0)	G2 v G3		

Group H

1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
Sun 14 June (Toulouse, 4.30)	H1 v H2		
Sun 14 June (Lens, 8.0)	H3 v H4		
Sat 20 June (Nantes, 4.30)	H2 v H4		
Sat 20 June (Paris, 1.30)	H1 v H3		
Fri 26 June (Bordeaux, 3.0)	H1 v H4		
Fri 26 June (Lyon, 3.0)	H2 v H3		

SECOND ROUND

Saturday 27 June: Game 2 (Marseille, 3.30)
Group B winner v Group A runner-up

Saturday 27 June: Game 1 (Paris, 8.0)
Group A winner v Group B runner-up

Sunday 28 June: Game 3 (Lens, 3.30)
Group C winner v Group D runner-up

Sunday 28 June: Game 4 (St Denis, 8.0)
Group D winner v Group C runner-up

Monday 29 June: Game 6 (Montpellier, 3.30)
Group F winner v Group E runner-up

Monday 29 June: Game 5 (Toulouse, 8.0)
Group E winner v Group F runner-up

Tuesday 30 June: Game 7 (Bordeaux, 3.30)
Group G winner v Group H runner-up

Tuesday 30 June: Game 8 (St Etienne, 8.0)
Group H winner v Group G runner-up

QUARTER-FINALS

Friday 3 July: Game B (St Denis, 3.30)
Game 2 winner v Game 3 winner

Friday 3 July: Game A (Nantes, 8.0)
Game 1 winner v Game 4 winner

Saturday 4 July: Game C (Marseille, 3.30)
Game 5 winner v Game 8 winner

Saturday 4 July: Game D (Lyon, 8.0)
Game 6 winner v Game 7 winner

SEMI-FINALS

Tuesday 7 July: Marseille (8.0)
Game A winner v Game C winner

Wednesday 8 July: St Denis (8.0)
Game B winner v Game D winner

THIRD PLACE PLAY-OFF: Saturday 11 July, Paris (8.0)

FINAL: Sunday 12 July, St Denis (8.0)
All times (which may be slightly altered to fit TV schedules) BST; local times one hour later.



Almost there: An aerial view of the Stade de France, in the Paris suburb of St Denis, which will host the World Cup final on 12 July Photograph: Reuters

Form guide to the 32 competing nations

Argentina

Fifa world ranking: 18
Appearances in finals: 11 (1930-34, 1958-66, 1974-94)
Best performance: Winners 1978, 1986

As winners in two of the last five finals, Argentina can't be written off. Under Daniel Passarella, they topped the nine-team South American group, even if defeats by Ecuador and Bolivia hardly suggest a world-beating force. Much depends on Diego Maradona's successor, Ariel Ortega, and striker Gabriel Batistuta. But quality in depth is lacking and disciplinary problems persist: three sent off v Peru in June.

Austria

Fifa world ranking: 26
Appearances in finals: 6 (1934, 1954-58, 1978-82, 1990)
Best performance: Third place 1954

Qualification was a reward for patience. Herbert Prohaska failed to get Austria to USA 94 or Euro 96, but was allowed to carry on building a rugged, organised side who draw heavily on players based in Italy, Spain and Germany. Werder Bremen's Andreas Herzog will be at home among the thoroughbreds in France, while old warhorse Toni Polster, of Cologne, recently overhauled Hans Krankl's record of 33 goals for his country.

Belgium

Fifa world ranking: 41
Appearances in finals: 9 (1930-38, 1954, 1970, 1982-94)
Best performance: Fourth place 1986

Although they have reached a fifth successive final, a run to the last four as in 1986 appears beyond George Leekens' ordinary team. The excellent Luc Nilis, of PSV Eindhoven, forms a lively attacking duo with Brazilian-born Luis Oliveira, but with Enzo Scifo past his prime the service may be inadequate. Two three-goal thumpings by the Dutch and slender wins v Wales (2-1, 3-2) give a true picture of their potential.

Brazil

Fifa world ranking: 1
Appearances in finals: 15 (1930-94)
Best performance: Winners 1958, 1962, 1970, 1994

Mario Zagallo's squad is so strong even Juninho may miss out. Winning the Copa America honed their competitive edge, as well as demonstrating that Romario (back for the first time since the '94 final) could bring the best out of Ronaldo. Stop those two and there's Rivaldo, all paces and power. Denilson, the planet's most expensive player, and Roberto Carlos, who moves a ball in the air like no one since Derek Underwood.

Bulgaria

Fifa world ranking: 24
Appearances in finals: 6 (1962-74, 1986, 1994)
Best performance: Fourth place 1994

In Bulgaria's first five finals, they played 16 times without winning. The sequence ended with a vengeance in 1994. Yordan Lechkov, Emil Kostadinov and Trifon "Wolfman" Ivanov are still around, the latter as captain; and - surprise, surprise - Hristo Stochkov made peace with coach Hristo Bonev in time to clamber aboard. With a history of internal strife and an old team, lightning will struggle to strike twice.

Cameroon

Fifa world ranking: 51
Appearances in finals: 3 (1982, 1990-94)
Best performance: Quarter-finals 1990

The "Indomitable Lions" are arguably Africa's weakest finalists. Roger Milla's class of '90 beat holders Argentina and came within two Liner penalties of the semi, but, judging by the recent 2-0 defeat to England, the current crop are unlikely to improve greatly on a poor '94. Patrick Mboma, a striker based in Japan, and Jacques Songo'o, a goalkeeper in Spain, offer the best hope of respectability.

Chile

Fifa world ranking: 17
Appearances in finals: 6 (1930, 1950, 1962-66, 1974, 1982)
Best performance: Third place 1962

Chile have not won in the finals since they were hosts in '62 and also lost all three group games in the Copa America last summer. They were, however, without the two players who could turn them into dark horses in France. Ivan Zamorano, Ronaldo's colleague in Milan, amassed 12 goals in qualifying, while Marcelo Salas hit 11 to attract interest (if not yet the £13m offer his club seek) from Manchester United.

Colombia

Fifa world ranking: 9
Appearances in finals: 3 (1962, 1990-94)
Best performance: Second round 1990

Tipped by Pele to win USA 94, their mediocre performance was followed by the murder of own-goal scorer Andres Escobar. His old colleagues soldier on - Carlos Valderrama, who now has more than 100 caps, Freddy Rincon and Tino Asprilla - but a trouble-free tournament looks Colombia's best hope. Dedicating a goal to two jailed drug barons, as Anthony De Avila did after beating Ecuador, did not bode well.

Croatia

Fifa world ranking: 21
First appearance in finals.

Croatia's war-torn history means national pride is a motivating factor. They made the quarter-finals of Euro 96 before losing to eventual winners Germany; now, having beaten Ukraine in a play-off, they can grace the global stage. Vlatko Blazevic, a prolific striker, and in Alen Boksic and Davor Suker he has forwards who make them a good bet to emulate the surprise impact of Sweden and Bulgaria in the US.

Denmark

Fifa world ranking: 8
Appearances in finals: 1 (1986)
Best performance: Second round 1986

If not as good as the "Danish Dynamite" side who peaked too soon in Mexico, or the Euro 92 gatecrashers, Bo Johansson's squad should still be a credit to a nation of five million people and three full-time clubs. Peter Schmeichel and Brian Laudrup give them presence at both ends, Marc Rieper and Morten Wieghorst the solidity in between. The once-magical Michael Laudrup may also have a few tricks left up his sleeve.

England

Fifa world ranking: 6
Appearances in finals: 9 (1950-70, 1982-90)
Best performance: Winners 1966

Glenn Hoddle says England are feared and, for once, there is no reason to dismiss a national coach's optimism as wishful thinking. Much may depend on Alan Shearer's fitness, but if there is strength in depth it is among the strikers and emulating the semi-final place of Italy 1990 is attainable. The squad is young, which in a 32-nation finals could be vital.

France

Fifa world ranking: 7
Appearances in finals: 9 (1930-38, 1954-58, 1966, 1978-86)
Best performance: Third place 1958, 1986

When they last hosted a major tournament, in '84, they took the European title. Aimé Jacquet's grafters have prompted damning comparisons with the panache of Platini, Tigana and Giresse - echoes of England in the build-up to 1986 and all that. Like Alf Ramsey, Jacquet has a strong defence and in Zinedine Zidane a playmaker with more than a frisson of flair. Now he needs to find his Geoff Hurst.

Germany

Fifa world ranking: 2
Appearances in finals: 14 (1934-38 as Germany; 1954-90 as West Germany; 1994 as Germany)
Best performance: Winners 1954, 1974, 1990

Despite being unbeaten in '86, the European champions drove Berti Vogts to distraction in qualifying. Northern Ireland drew in Nuremberg and Albania gave Ukraine a glimpse of France by leading and twice levelling before Oliver Bierhoff's last-gasp winner. Jürgen Klinsmann is among five survivors from Italia '90, and after the American aberration the onus is on the old guard to restore Germany's standing.

Iran

Fifa world ranking: 50
Appearances in finals: 1 (1978)
Best performance: First round

Enjoyed initial success in the Asian section with the long ball to Ali Daei, but Saturday's draw in Melbourne was their sixth consecutive qualifier without a win. They now have a Brazilian coach, Valdir Vieira, and Bundesliga players in Karim Bagheri and Khodadad Azizi. Mark Bosnich admitted they were Australia's hardest opponents. Scotland, wounded by the 1-1 draw in '78, would certainly not underestimate them.

Italy

Fifa world ranking: 10
Appearances in finals: 13 (1934-54, 1962-94)
Best performance: Winners 1934, 1938, 1982

The crisis that consumed Italy after England drew in Rome has been only partly assuaged by play-off success. The Azzurri stand condemned for tactical ineptitude. Cesare Maldini for failing to settle on a striking duo, it all sounds similar to four years ago, but Italy went on to take Brazil all the way to penalties in LA. Two goals conceded in 10 unbeaten qualifiers suggests that they could yet come good again.

Japan

Fifa world ranking: 39
First appearance in finals.

"The Reggae Boyz" have a samba feel: a Brazilian coach (René Simoes), gold and green strip, slow build-up followed by explosive bursts, and exuberant fans. They have also exploited English immigration well, recruiting Deon Burton, Robbie Earle and more. Marley's "One Love" is their anthem - they so often win by that score - and any snow-free country that enters bobsleigh in the Olympics is not to be sniffed at.

Japan

Fifa world ranking: 18
First appearance in finals.

The joint hosts of 2002 scraped into their first finals with a goal in the last minute of extra time against Iran last month. They have two better than average forwards in former Serie A player Kazu Mura and Brazilian Wagner Lopes but little else other than enthusiasm. The big countries will welcome them into their groups as qualification fodder. Their destiny is to be over-run.

Jamaica

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Mexico

Fifa world ranking: 11
Appearances in finals: 10 (1930, 1950-70, 1978, 1986, 1994)
Best performance: Quarter-finals 1970, 1986

The power in the Concacaf pool - this is their 11th finals after losing one qualifying game in '16 - they usually get swallowed by the bigger fish. Quarter-finalists only when they have hosted the tournament, their cause was not helped when they sacked their coach last week. Manuel Laquerente will guide "El Tricolor" in France, probably straight on to the plane home after the qualification phase. Much will depend on playmaker Alberto Garcia Aspe.

Morocco

Fifa world ranking: 16
Appearances in finals: 2 (1970, 1986)
Best performance: Second round 1986

The self-styled Atlas Lions are in their fourth World Cup proper and in coach Henri Michel they have someone who has guided a team, France, to the semi-finals in 1986. They have drawn with Croatia, beaten Nigeria and lost narrowly to Brazil in recent matches - and the Moroccans are just the sort of underrated team who inflict surprise en route to marvellable failure. Scotland beware.

Netherlands

Fifa world ranking: 12
Appearances in finals: 6 (1934-38, 1974-78, 1990-94)
Best performance: Runners-up 1974, 1978

They fight like alley cats, and that is just among themselves. If you want to find the least harmonious squad in France then look no further than the Dutch, but if they do concentrate on the opposition they could surpass the 70s sides of glorious memory and win their first World Cup. Bergkamp, Kluivert, Davids, Overmars: only Brazil and Nigeria will be better blessed by natural ability.

Nigeria

Fifa world ranking: 71
Appearances in finals: 1 (1994)
Best performance: Second round 1994

The Super Eagles were brought to earth in USA 94 by Italy in the second round, although they were leading with two minutes to go. The Olympic champions, they dominated a qualifying group

that also included Kenya and Guinea and took the best of the African qualifiers. Talented but defensively naïve, Terry Venables' possible appointment as coach makes them even more intriguing.

Norway

Fifa world ranking: 14
Appearances in finals: 2 (1938, 1994)
Best performance: Second round 1994

Leonhardsen, Solskjaer, Ostensjøen... so many Norwegians play in the Premiership their team will be more familiar to English eyes than Scotland. Fast and hard-tackling, they romped through their qualifying group (21 goals for, 2 against) and are just the sort of underdogs no team will want to meet. If they can marry guile to strength, the quarter-finals are viable at least.

Paraguay

Fifa world ranking: 30
Appearances in finals: 4 (1930, 1950, 1958, 1986)
Best performance: Second round 1986

Paraguay were the surprise package of South American qualifying coming second behind Argentina with nine wins from 16 matches. Defensively minded, they strike on the counter, which may not be compulsive viewing but they do have a goalkeeper, Jose Luis Chilavert, who goes forward more often than Schmeichel and scores goals at set-pieces. Difficult to beat, they could reach the second round but should progress no further.

Romania

Fifa world ranking: 5
Appearances in finals: 6 (1930-38, 1970, 1990-94)
Best performance: Quarter-finals 1994

English astonishment at Romania's seeding overlooks appearances at the last three finals, including a quarter-final place last time. They comfortably shock off the Republic of Ireland in qualifying - nine wins, one draw - and in George Hagi and Marius Lăcătuș they have world-class players on the biggest stage for the last time. Skill they will have in abundance, but tiredness might drag them down.

Saudi Arabia

Fifa world ranking: 34
Appearances in finals: 1 (1994)
Best performance: Second round 1994

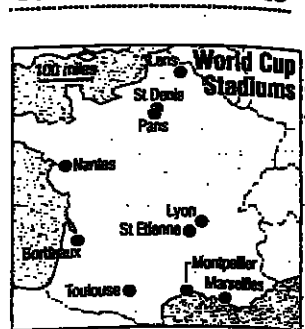
Surprised Belgium last time and are capable of upsetting others in France, although an avalanche of goals is unlikely. Coached by the German, Otto Pfister, they scored just eight times in eight second-round qualifying matches, although, like Japan, they got to the finals ahead of Iran. Unlikely to do much other than unexpectedly make up the numbers.

Scotland

Fifa world ranking: 36
Appearances in finals: 7 (1954-58, 1974-90)
Best performance: First round

Consistency and clean sheets are not normally the Scots' strongest suits. Craig Brown has changed all that. His next trick must be to go beyond the group stage and lose the hated "gallant failures" tag. Fine goal-keeping, mean defence and Gary McAllister's guile will help, along with meticulous planning and squad spirit. Scoring is the snag, making Kevin Gallacher's fitness and form unexpectedly crucial.

THE STADIUMS



- 1 St Denis: Stade de France (capacity 80,000)
- 2 Paris: Parc des Princes (49,000)
- 3 Bordeaux: Stade Matabielle (36,500)
- 4 Lens: Stade Felix-Bollaert (41,275)
- 5 Lyon: Stade de Gerland (44,000)
- 6 Marseille: Stade Vélodrome (60,000)
- 7 Montpellier: Stade de la Mosson (35,500)
- 8 Nantes: Stade de la Beaujoire (38,500)
- 9 St Etienne: Stade Geoffroy-Guichard (36,000)
- 10 Toulouse: Stade Municipal (36,500)

South Africa

Fifa world ranking: 35
First appearance in finals.

No African team is complete without a nickname and theirs is Bafana Bafana (Boys, Boys). This is their first finals and their winning of the African Nations Cup last year underlines their potential, as did their performance against England at Old Trafford. Mark Fish and Eric Tinkler are the Premiership but you fear a team whose principal striker is Phil Masinga, who hardly set the world alight at Leeds.

South Korea

Fifa world ranking: 31
Appearances in finals: 4 (1950, 1954-58, 1978-82, 1990)
Best performance: First round

South Korea's record is lamer than - no wins in 11 matches but their qualification record is enough to make England envious as they have reached four consecutive finals. A win over Norway and a draw with Yugoslavia this year suggests they are nobody mugs and at USA 94 they drew with Spain and Bolivia before losing 3-2 to the Germans. Even so first-round failure beckons again.

Spain

Fifa world ranking: 3
Appearances in finals: 9 (1930, 1950, 1962-66, 1978-82, 1990)
Best performance: Fourth place 1950

The ultimate underachievers of the World Cup, Spain have more than their fair share of talent but they have to go back to 1950 for their best performance in the finals, fourth. Even Alfie Dix Stefano could not do anything better out of them, so it is unlikely that Real Madrid, Raul Gonzalez will be able to do better. Great clubs, shame about the national side.

Tunisia

Fifa world ranking: 23
Appearances in finals: 1 (1978)
Best performance: First round

It will be 20 years since Tunisia last graced the finals, and when they flopped as hosts of the African Nations Cup in 1994 looked like another 20 year wait before they got their again. Coach Henri Kasperczak changed that and they qualified easily out of a group that included Egypt, Namibia and Georg Weah's Liberia.

United States

Fifa world ranking: 29
Appearances in finals: 5 (1930, 1950, 1982, 1990, 1994)
Best performance: Semi-final 1930

Limited but with an endless capacity for work, they could be Leicester City of the finals - and, who are the Coca-Cola Cup holders? This will be their third consecutive World Cup and they must be better for their 1994 experience, when they beat Colombia and missed out on goal difference. Hard to beat but, like four years ago, goals will be hard to come by.

Yugoslavia

Fifa world ranking: 22
Appearances in finals: 8 (1930, 1950-52, 1974, 1982, 1990)
Best performance: Semi-finals 19

FOOTBALL

Pompey's cash crisis leaves players unpaid

The extent of Portsmouth's financial plight was revealed yesterday as the club confirmed they had not yet been able to pay last month's wages to their players and staff.

Supporters have also been warned that the Fratton End stand may have to be closed for Saturday's game against Stoke as renovation work has been halted because the builders have not been paid in full.

A Portsmouth spokeswoman confirmed that the club have been experiencing a "temporary cash-flow problem", but insisted that staff and players would receive their November wages on time.

Terry Venables, who was reported to have bought a new house in the summer, is meeting financial consultants to resolve the situation. His return from Australia last night.

Though he has pledged to the club, who are owners of the First Division, that there is a "completable with finances", the club spokeswoman, who was the first time played on time, said cash-flow problems are well chronicled. We have no secret of them.

We have a particular problem this week, but are confident of resolving the situation at the earliest stage.

"We have got people working around the clock to ease the cash-flow problem. We are owed a lot of money, but that is staggered over time, such as with transfer fees for players we have sold."

"Mr Venables has been in Australia and a few things have escalated during that time, but now he is back at the helm and involved in meetings with banks and financial people to sort it out. We are disappointed that the matter has entered the public forum, when people have been assured it would be dealt with swiftly and adequately internally."

She also confirmed that work had been halted on the structure below the Fratton End stand which includes a restaurant, because of the financial problems. "We need to pay the builders, but the money from the Football Trust only arrives in monthly instalments," she said.

Fans, including season ticket holders, have been told to wait further information as to whether the stand will be open for Saturday's match.

The spokeswoman insisted that the problems were

nowhere near as bad as 20 years ago, when a fund-raising campaign had to be launched to keep the club afloat.

But many supporters seem to have lost patience with the club, who almost reached the play-offs last year, but have since slumped into the relegation zone.

John Westwood, a member of the supporters' club who has officially changed his middle name to "Portsmouth Football Club", said: "Everyone respects Terry Venables' abilities as a football coach, but much less so as a businessman. We seem to have stumbled from disaster to disaster, which is especially frustrating if you look at the potential here."

Venables went on local television last night to explain that although the bank had been "very tough", he still believed he would be successful in attracting more money into the club.

Brendan Batson, of the Professional Footballers' Association, said none of the Portsmouth players had approached the PFA about not having received their wages, which should have been paid into their accounts last Friday. But he said: "We are aware that there seems to be a short-term problem and we will be checking it out."



West Bromwich Albion's Andy Hunt and Tony Vaughan of Manchester City vie for possession at The Hawthorns on Tuesday night. City's 1-0 victory was only their third win in 12 First Division matches. Photograph: Ben Radford/Allsport

Association
supports
referee Lynch

The Referees' Association has defended match official Kevin Lynch after he came under fire for sending off five players, including four from Bristol Rovers, during Tuesday night's Second Division game against Wigan at Springfield Park.

Peter Willis, spokesman for the association, said he was "saddened" by comments made by Geoff Dunford, the Rovers vice-chairman, after the game. Dunford said: "To think that this man is on the list as a linesman. He is an absolute disgrace to professional football."

There was further controversy at Luton where referee Paul Taylor has requested video evidence to show what happened after a 22-man brawl broke out during the game with Gillingham. Bedfordshire police have interviewed Gillingham's Iffy Onuora after an allegation that he assaulted a spectator.

Liverpool in hunt for Serrant

Roy Evans, the Liverpool manager, has been in talks with Oldham about signing their England Under-21 full-back Carl Serrant, who is also being tracked by Blackburn, Leeds and Leicester.

West Bromwich Albion have already bid £600,000. Serrant's contract is up in the summer when, under the Bosman ruling, he could leave for nothing. Oldham want £1m, but Liverpool may offer a package deal worth that in instalments.

Peter Ridsdale, the Leeds chairman, said yesterday he was "disappointed" that Rod Wallace and Gary Kelly had not signed long-term contracts with the club. Kelly still has a year left, but Wallace will be a free agent in the summer and Ridsdale has made it clear that he will not be held to ransom.

"Rod Wallace would appear to wish to wait," Ridsdale said. "If he carries on with his stance, we must take the view that he may not be here beyond the end of the season."

Leeds were also unhappy at yesterday's news that Harry Kewell has been selected to play for Australia in this month's Confederation Cup in Saudi Arabia. Kewell has been included in a 20-strong squad which also includes Mark Bosnich of Aston Villa, Stan Lazaridis of West Ham and Southampton's Robbie Slater.

Australia's assistant coach, Raul Blanco, said that under Fifa rules clubs had no option but to release their players and he was adamant that all those selected would be in Saudi Arabia for the eight-night tournament. "Clubs just don't have a leg to stand on," Blanco said. "Legally, they can't do it."

Juventus are reported to be considering buying a 10 per cent stake in Crystal Palace. The Italian club's vice-president, Roberto Bettiga, was due to attend last night's game at West Ham. Manchester United will have a fourth look at the Chilean striker Marcelo Salas before the

end of the month. United scout Martin Ferguson, younger brother of manager Alex, is to fly to South America to see the 22-year-old play for his Argentinian club side, River Plate.

Gary Mabbutt, the Tottenham defender, has told new coach Christian Gross he still wants to play for the club, despite being left out of Saturday's match at Everton. The 36-year-old, whose contract runs out in the summer, has been with Spurs for 15 seasons.

Across north London, Arsenal are reported to be interested in the St Johnstone full-back Callum Davidson, after an impressive performance against Rangers last Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Perth club's attempts to sign Swedish striker Lars Gunnar Karlsson could be thwarted by Britain's quarantine rules. The player is suffering from a move to Scotland after learning he may have to leave his pet rottweiler, Ted, in Sweden.

— Catherine Riley

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Injuries mar City success

ter City could pay a price for the victory they were the turning point of the season. Their captain, Kevin Horlock, midfielder Georgi Kinkladze and both doubtful for their home match with

chieved only their second win of the season after a Tuesday night draw at leaders Nottingham Forest — but lost both players with injuries.

Horlock, captain for the first time after Kit Symons was

relieved of the skipper's armband 24 hours earlier because of fans' abuse, was injured after 35 seconds.

The midfielder was carried off with a knee injury following his first tackle, and will receive constant treatment in an effort to play on Saturday. Kinkladze limped off near the end with thigh and ankle problems.

Alan Hill, City's assistant manager, said: "Both must only have 50-50 chances of playing. It will be 24 hours at least before we have a better idea, but they are both a worry for us."

City will not consider the problem of who is to be the next captain until Horlock is ruled out. Nobody took the armband at the Hawthorns. "Somebody should have done so officially but it got overlooked," Frank Clark, the manager, said. "I hope that doesn't mean they will take the three points off us. Thankfully, we had 11 skippers out there."

The result and performance was in sharp contrast to the defeat at their neighbours, Stockport, last weekend.

SAILING

Heiner returns to take helm of struggling Brunel Sunergy

Wholesale changes were announced on the Dutch Whitbread entry Brunel Sunergy yesterday in order to turn around the fortunes of a boat which has been last on the two legs to Cape Town and Fremantle so far.

The original skipper Roy Heiner will retake the helm after the departure of Hans Bouschulte. Part of the deal will mean Heiner bringing in three others, including Gerald Ro-

give of Switzerland, who left after the first leg from Southampton. The British navigator, Stuart Quarrie, says, but Joao Cabecadas of Portugal will leave along with Herve Jan and Eric Drouglazet.

Bouschulte replaced Arend van Bergeijk as skipper before the start of the race, while Heiner had departed much earlier after feeling that the project, put together by Benno Wiersma, a property develop-

er, lacked sufficient funding. After he left, more financial support came in, but it was thought that Heiner would find a reconciliation difficult, even though he had sailed many times for Wiersma on the regatta circuit. Now it seems that the way has been cleared for his return.

Brunel Sunergy is the only boat of the remaining nine not to have been designed by the US-based New Zealander

Bruce Farr. It came from the board of the German/Dutch designers Judel and Vrolijk in Hamburg and has suffered a number of setbacks, including having to call into Recife, Brazil, on the first leg to fit a new rudder after hitting a whale.

On the second leg, the backstay broke, allowing the top section of the mast to bend forward, and the crew then had to nurse the 64ft yacht through the southern ocean.

BASKETBALL

Worthing opt for strength after McElduff departs

Worthing Bears have strengthened their playing roster by signing the American point guard Joel Burns and the Canadian guard Greg Francis, subject to securing work permits.

The Budweiser League club, forced to re-group following the withdrawal of the owner, Greg Fullerton, and the departures of their coaches, Chris Jones and Neil McElduff, are also aiming to re-sign the Canadian forward Shawn Swords.

Swords quit after Jones announced his resignation three weeks ago and since then the point guard Ryan Cuff and the captain Ben Caton have also left.

McElduff, assistant coach at Worthing for eight-and-a-half years, took over from Jones, but resigned yesterday, having been in charge for just one game. The American forward Ryan Williams has taken over the running of the team until the end of the season.

Christian Hamilton, the Worthing co-owner and director of operations, hopes Swords will be back in the team for the visit of Crystal Palace on Saturday in the Uni-ball Trophy.

Burns, who is 6ft 2in and will take over at point guard from Cuff, played five games for Watford Royals at the beginning of the season. Francis, 6ft 3in, had four years at Fairfield University during which he played in 115 games.

The newly reformed Oldham club, which was accepted into associate membership of the League, has made its first signing. John Hough, the former Warrington hooker who has been freed by his previous club, has signed a one-year contract, along with Darren Robinson, who played reserve-team rugby for the now defunct Oldham Bears last season.

Lokeni Savell, the Western Samoan forward, who was briefly on the transfer list at Salford last season, has signed a new one-year contract with the club.

— Dave Hadfield

SPORTING DIGEST

CRICKET

Dravid holds off Sri Lanka

India 247-3 v Sri Lanka

Rahul Dravid was out in the nervous 90s for the second Test in the third and final day in Bombay yesterday.

Nayan Mongia was bowled 'the second over by Pramod Wickramasinghe and then by Sidhu was caught trying to spin the spinner Kumar.

Dravid, who made 92 in the second Test at Nagpur, fell this time for 93 — but he helped India consolidate with a 150-run stand for the third wicket with Sourav Ganguly (92 not out).

First day: Sri Lanka 100-2 (1st Innings) India 247-3 (2nd Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (3rd Innings) India 247-3 (4th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (5th Innings) India 247-3 (6th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (7th Innings) India 247-3 (8th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (9th Innings) India 247-3 (10th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (11th Innings) India 247-3 (12th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (13th Innings) India 247-3 (14th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (15th Innings) India 247-3 (16th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (17th Innings) India 247-3 (18th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (19th Innings) India 247-3 (20th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (21st Innings) India 247-3 (22nd Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (23rd Innings) India 247-3 (24th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (25th Innings) India 247-3 (26th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (27th Innings) India 247-3 (28th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (29th Innings) India 247-3 (30th Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (31st Innings) India 247-3 (32nd Innings) Sri Lanka 100-2 (33rd Innings) India 247-3 (34th Innings) Sri Lanka 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Bentley dropped as exposed England struggle to find a creative force

England are preparing to field yet another reshuffled back division against New Zealand in the rugby union Test at Twickenham on Saturday, with a student rookie, David Rees, and two non-specialist wings, Austin Healey and Tim Stimpson, competing for the dubious honour of confronting Jeff Wilson and a certain Mr Lomu. Chris Hewitt finds the red rose army in disarray.

Oh to be an All Black selector. The all-conquering New Zealanders suffered what should have been two debilitating injury setbacks yesterday when Sean Fitzpatrick, their talismanic captain, and Craig Dowd, his front row sidekick from Auckland, called in sick. Fitzpatrick, who has struggled all tour with a knee condition, misses this weekend's finale with England while Dowd's dodgy hamstring will almost certainly prevent him starting the game. Did the bad tidings cost John Hart, the coach, a single moment's shut-eye? Of course not.

Hart simply reconfirmed Norm Hewitt as Fitz's replacement - the aggressive Southlander has punched his considerable weight in all three Tests so far - and named Anton Oliver, probably one of the best half-dozen hookers in world rugby, on the bench. Meanwhile, Mark Allen, the formidable Manawatu Bull, was bracketed with the doubtful Dowd in the loose-head position.

Clive Woodward and his England selection panel are not quite so comfortably off, particularly in the creative areas. Nick Greenstock, a try-scorer against the Springboks six days ago, dislocated a shoulder joint during training on Tuesday night and joins three other prized members of the midfield fraternity - Alex King, Mike Catt and Jeremy Guscott - among the walking wounded. Woodward is hoping against hope that Phil de Glanville, the former national captain, recovers from his ankle trouble in time to confront the Blacks. If he fails, Matt Perry is likely to move to outside centre with Tim Stimpson, called into the squad yesterday.

Stimpson may feature anyway, in the unfamiliar position of wing. England's decision to dispense with the services of the Lion of Cleckheaton, better known as John Bentley, after 54 unusually anonymous minutes against the South Africans, is understandable. However, a strange reluctance to recall Adekunle Adebisi of Bath to the fray leaves the selectors badly exposed in both wing positions.

David Rees, three caps into his Test career, is certain to fill one of them, with Austin Healey, England's first-choice scrum-half as recently as last spring, a marginal favourite to join him in the firing line. Both men enjoy a tackle but they would have to stand on each other's shoulders just to establish a nodding acquaintance with Jonah Lomu's navel. Woodward has taken a gamble or two already this season, but this would be something else again.

Two of England's back-row contingent, Neil Back and Chris Sheehy, were also carrying minor injuries yesterday and while both were expected to pass imminent fitness tests, Woodward sensibly opted to delay naming his side until lunchtime today. It was left to Lawrence Dallaglio, the captain, to sound an upbeat note.

"People have described this series against the southern hemisphere nations as suicidal, but it's been the best thing that could have happened to us," he said. "Yes, it's been a painful process - the supporters want victories and so do we and it's difficult to find much to cheer about when we lose 29-11, as we did against the Boks last weekend - but it's a beneficial process, too. We have to go through this; the alternative is to cover over the cracks, as we did in '93 when we beat the All Blacks with five penalties. They went away and revolutionised their rugby while we sat back, thinking everything was hunky-dory when it obviously wasn't."

By playing these games, we're putting ourselves in a better position to become the best."

● The Rugby Football Union's International Board representative, John Jeavons-Fellows, faces a vote of no confidence when the 50-strong RFU council meets tomorrow. The RFU management board chairman, Cliff Brittle, is thought to be unhappy with the way Jeavons-Fellows represents the RFU on IB issues.

Marseilles welcomes the world to their party

The eyes of the world will be on Marseilles as the French city hosts tonight's World Cup draw. It is most ambitious draw in the tournament's history - possibly, reflects Glenn Moore in the ancient port, too ambitious.

The stage is built, 643 qualifying games completed, 38,000 invitations and 1,181 media passes issued, every hotel room for 30 miles is full and, from the window of mine (somewhere on the ring-road), I can see council workers painting over anti-government graffiti.

Marseilles is almost ready for the biggest day in its 26-century history, the draw for the XVIth World Cup. There are only two problems, the transport workers and the weather.

Two local transport unions, with an opportunistic French coach Aimé Jacquet would welcome in his own strikers, have called a one-day stoppage over pay and conditions which could paralyse an already congested city. Negotiations broke down late on Tuesday, no further talks are planned, and the controversial centre-right Mayor, Jean-Claude Gaudin, has appealed for lorry drivers and private bus-drivers to come forward and help ferry the 25,000 youngsters who have been invited to the draw to the Stade Vélodrome.

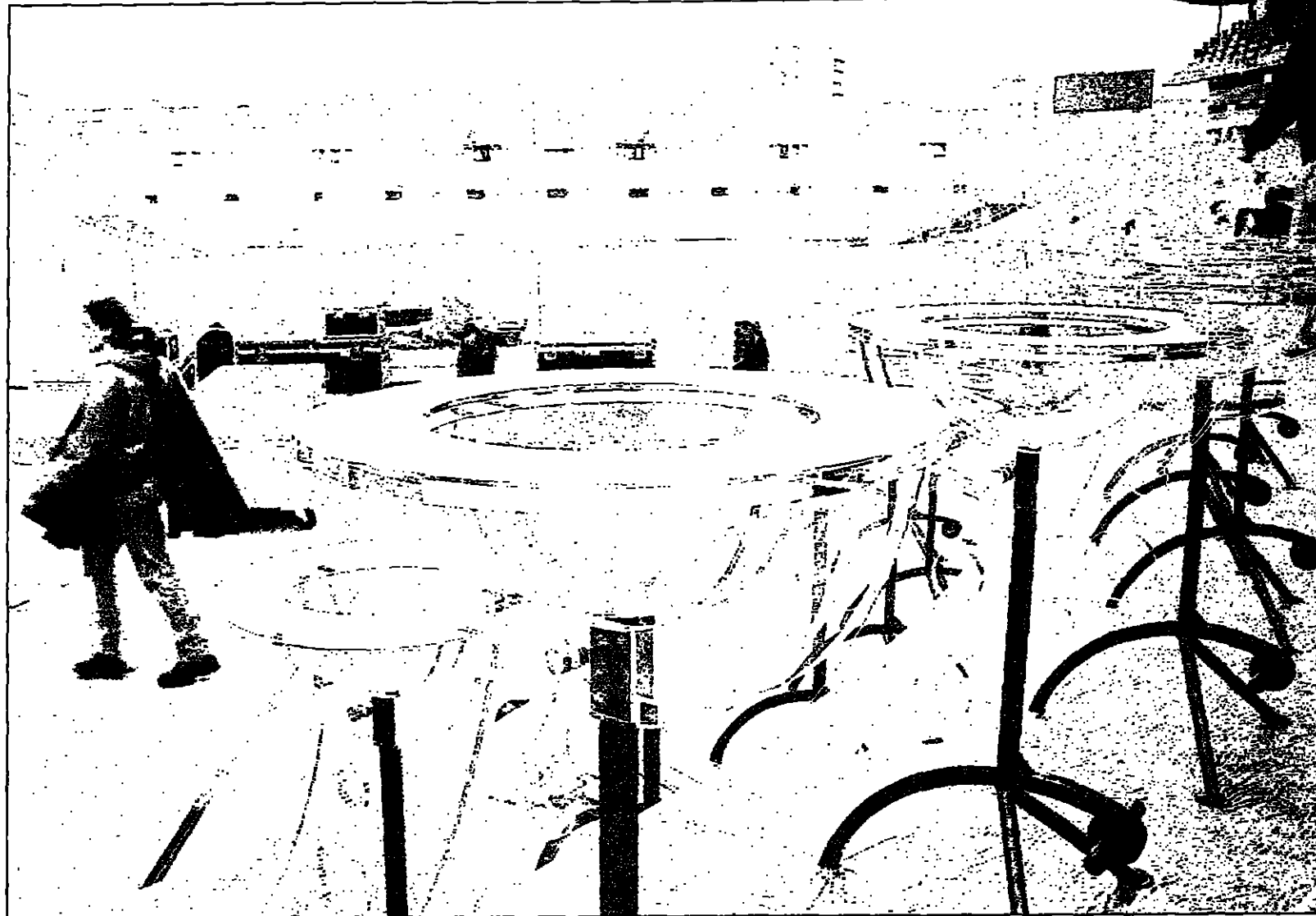
Last-minute negotiations may yet settle that dispute but even Michel Platini, co-presi-

dent of the organising committee and France's greatest-ever player, cannot influence the weather. To the organisers' relief it was dry yesterday but still cold and windy. Suddenly the idea of staging an open-air draw is looking over-ambitious.

Rain is not regarded as a major problem as the draw is under cover (though most of the 38,000 spectators are not). Strong wind, and Le Mistral in full city, will be and not just because it will push temperatures for the three-hour extravaganza towards zero.

"We imagined this draw as a big party," said Platini. "We wanted it to be for everybody, not 1,500 VIPs. But there is no covered stadium in France. This is the second largest and the most southermost, so we hoped there may be sunshine. But, if it is windy, the structure of the tent [covering the stage] may not cope. In that case we would have to go inside." The spectators would still be able to see the draw, but on two big screens at the ground. The latest forecast is for a dry but cold day with winds dropping from 35mph to less than 25mph as the afternoon wears on.

Wherever the draw is held the stage is going to be crowded. Overseeing the draw will be Platini, Sepp Blatter, general secretary of Fifa, the sport's world governing body, and two French television presenters. Fishing the balls out of bowls will be Franz Beckenbauer and Carlos Alberto Pereira, the last two World Cup winning managers, Liberia's World Player of the Year George Weah, former French internationals



Ready for the balls: The glass bowls which will be used in tonight's draw in Marseilles for the World Cup finals

Photograph: Gabriel Bouys/AFP

Jean-Pierre Papin, Marius Tressor and Raymond Kopa, and US Olympic women's football gold medalist Julie Foudy. It's a wonder local author Peter Mayle was not invited as well.

One illustrious name is missing, last week's runaway winner in the Hall of Fame voting for the world's greatest-ever player, Pele is in Marseilles, working for Mastercard but, as in Las Vegas four years ago, he is not involved in the draw.

Officially this is because he is present "in other capacities", though this applies to others involved notably Beckenbauer and Pereira. Unofficially it is because of Pele's long-running dispute with João Havelange.

Fifa's veteran autocratic president, this originally stems from a dispute involving television deals in Brazilian football but has developed into a battle for control of the Brazilian game - Havelange's son-in-law, Ricardo Teixeira, is the head of the CBF, the Brazilian FA. Pele is Brazil's sports minister. Pele is currently attempting to pass anti-corruption legislation which would emasculate the CBF.

The draw will be preceded by an exhibition match featuring one player from each of the 32 qualifiers. Like the draw, this is beginning to appear a good idea in principle but a bad one in practice. The match is Europe (15 qualifiers plus, bizarrely,

Iran) v Rest of the World (the other 16). Beckenbauer and Pereira are managers and they originally chose two impressive squads. However, withdrawals through injury or by clubs have robbed the game of Premiership players Peter Schmeichel and Stig Inge Bjørnebye (who are due to be playing at Anfield less than 48 hours later), Dan Petrescu, Gary McAllister, Faustino Asprilla and Mark Fish as well as the likes of Paul Gascoigne, Paulo Maldini, Dejan Savicevic and Jose Luis Chilavert.

Paul Ince, suspended for Anfield, has replaced Gascoigne while Gordon Durie steps in for McAllister. He is such a late re-

placement after Celtic refused Darren Jackson permission he is billed as Ian Durie - by a blockhead, one presumes.

There will be some outstanding talents on display, including Ronaldo, Patrick Kluivert, Zinedine Zidane, Alen Boksic, Gabriel Batistuta and Nwankwo Kanu. As well as Ince, Derty's Deon Burton and Chelsea's Frude Grodas represent the Premiership though both will start on the bench.

EUROPE: Kasper (Germany & Marseilles); Pfeifferberger (Austria & Bordeaux); Colding (Denmark & Bordeaux); Costacurta (Italy & Milan); Høegh (Spain & Real Madrid); Lemmink (Belgium & Espanyol); Balakova (Russia & Vissla); Ince (England & Liverpool); Zinedine (France & Juventus); Solari (Croatia & Lazio); Klavert (Netherlands & Middlesbrough); Grodas (Netherlands & Chelsea); Boksic (Yugoslavia & Tottenham); Lacatus (Romania & Steaua Bucharest); Pashazadeh (Iran & Tehran); Durie (Scotland & Rangers).

REST OF THE WORLD: Songo'o (Cameroon & La Coruna); Myung-Ba Hong (South Korea & Bournemouth); Mangan (Chile & Universidad Catolica, Santiago); Cruz & La Coruna; Berni (Morocco & Mexico); Nakata (Japan & Bournemouth); Salami (Nigeria & Newcastle); Sallam (Saudi Arabia); Batistuta (Argentina & Fiorentina); Kanu (Nigeria & Internazionale); Ronaldo (Brazil & Internazionale); Solari (Croatia & Lazio); Klavert (Netherlands & Middlesbrough); Grodas (Netherlands & Chelsea); Boksic (Yugoslavia & Tottenham); Lacatus (Romania & Steaua Bucharest); Pashazadeh (Iran & Tehran); Durie (Scotland & Rangers).

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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3473, Thursday 4 December By Mass Monday's Solution

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25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32

ACROSS

- 1 Around North words negotiated work in plant (8)
- 2 Provided with yellow American hat (6)
- 3 Pawn captured by right gull (4)
- 4 A cause of inflation? (10)
- 5 Real? True? It's made up anyway (10)
- 6 Boat has dirty look reduced (4)
- 7 Summer's first damn fly! (5)
- 8 Food with stringy green runner (9)
- 9 Party of reaction (9)
- 10 Folk taking credit for brawl (5)
- 11 Single out the best in revolution (4)
- 12 Pages offering a sober conclusion to colonists (10)

DOWN

- 1 Non-Union congress I had to pacify (10)
- 2 Chisel found by one image? (4)
- 3 Report gist, or edit (6)
- 4 Discharge makes one pass out (8)
- 5 Fortify harbour (7)
- 6 Melancholy without love we crave, and solitary (9)
- 7 Odd Bach, not church but dance music (5)
- 8 Interlinked coat ripped? (5)
- 9 Curst bit of mail (7)
- 10 Fellow lops plants (7)
- 11 Moon's weedy plants (5)
- 12 Carpet with double check? (7)
- 13 Fruit from tree - in can, otherwise (9)
- 14 Storm's filled river with lumber (7)

MONDAY'S SOLUTION

DOWN: 1. FORTIFICATION, 2. CHISEL, 3. SUMMARY, 4. DISCHARGE, 5. FORTIFY, 6. MELANCHOLY, 7. BACH, 8. INTERLINKED, 9. CURST, 10. FELLOW, 11. MOON, 12. CARPET, 13. FRUIT, 14. STORM.

ACROSS: 1. NEGOTIATED, 2. YELLOW, 3. CAPTURED, 4. INFLATION, 5. TRUE, 6. DIRTY, 7. DAMN, 8. STRINGY, 9. PARTY, 10. BRAWL, 11. SINGLE, 12. CONCLUSION.

Havelange backs land of gold and diamonds

The 1998 World Cup draw may be the centre of attention in Marseilles but, behind the scenes, the 2006 candidates are seeking to win friends and influence people. Glenn Moore reports.

South Africa received the biggest boost in the race to host the World Cup yesterday when João Havelange, the retiring president of the sport's world governing body, Fifa, offered them a ringing endorsement. "South Africa has all the facilities to host the World Cup," said the 82-year-old

Brazilian. "It's the world No 1 in gold and diamonds and has good communications, road, transport, hotels and stadiums. They have everything needed - all they have to do is ask."

Fortunately for England, Havelange can no longer decide hosts by himself, but he remains influential. Alec McGiven, the head of England's bid, said: "South Africa have not entered yet, but it would not be a surprise if they are in contention when the decision is made in two and a half years' time."

Havelange's opinion is interesting, but other people will be making the decision. The Football Association, with bid ambassadors Sir Bobby Charlton

and Geoff Hurst, are conducting a series of low-key briefings with senior foreign journalists. They will be joined today by Tony Banks, the sports minister.

Also in Marseilles yesterday was Alan Shearer, here to complete a 15-year endorsement deal with Umbro which will take him to the age of 42. The deal is worth millions, depending on his and his teams' successes, possibly £10m-20m.

The England and Newcastle United striker confirmed that he did not expect to play again until March but was confident he would be fit for the finals. "The specialist has told me when my ankle injury is mended it will be better than ever," he said.

TENNIS

Larsson sleeps on as bomb explodes under his car

A bomb explosion has damaged the car of Sweden's Magnus Larsson only hours after he returned home following his country's Davis Cup victory. No one was injured in the explosion, which ripped a hole in the floor of the player's rented car. "I'm not aware that anyone would be after me," he said. "Neither I nor anyone else on the national team have received any threats."

Larsson rented the car in Gothenburg on Monday and drove 125 miles home to the southern city of Växjö, where he parked the car outside his apartment building.

A small bomb planted beneath the car exploded early on Tuesday morning. "The explosion was heard more than a mile and a half away, but not by me," Larsson said. "I slept right through it."

Larsson beat the world No 2, Michael Chang, on Sunday to complete Sweden's 5-0 defeat of the United States. On Friday, he beat Pete Sampras, who retired injured.

Another national team member, Magnus Norman, underwent a five-hour laser-surgery operation on Monday to correct a long-standing heart condition.

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